FILM QUARTERLY

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DAVID SIMON: *GENERATION KILL, THE WIRE*

LEBANESE CINEMA

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THE WIRE, VERTIGO

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COVER PHOTO Michael Kenneth Williams in the fifth season of *The Wire*. Photo: Nicole Rivelli. © 2008 HBO.

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MAKE-BELIEVE, MEMORY FAILURE

***Cry Me a River* (Jia Zhang-ke)**
***Hunger* (Steve McQueen)**
***Waltz with Bashir* (Ari Folman)**

During a persuasive contribution to a *Sight and Sound* discussion event ("The Good Critic," October 8) in London, *Cahiers du cinéma* editor Jean-Michel Frodon contrasted what he termed "hot" criticism with the "cold" work of academic research. As a description of how film interpretation has become polarized, Frodon's binary is hard to contest, but it should be mentioned that there are other kinds of writing and these need not be tepid or half-baked. *Film Quarterly* is committed to blending fluency with intellectual ambition. Therefore we publish carefully wrought pieces of an intermediate length, shorter than academic articles but longer than typical magazine coverage, aiming to appeal to specialists and nonspecialists alike.

Film Quarterly differs from most scholarly periodicals by often reviewing films (including DVD reissues) within about six months of release. Timeliness fosters productive debate and, to increase promptness and breadth, this quarter's opening columns report on films shown at the recent festivals in New York (September 26–October 12, organized by the Film Society of Lincoln Center) and London (October 15–30, British Film Institute, my former employer).

Speaking of the columns, some design changes have been made in response to reader feedback and in the interests of at-a-glance intelligibility. There are now descriptive subtitles in the table of contents and, at the beginning of the columns reviewing festival or current theatrical releases, a preliminary listing of the films which are discussed in detail. (Please note that columnists' reviews of new releases may, as with my remarks below about *Waltz with Bashir* and William Johnson's about *The Class*, contain spoilers.)

It might be suggested that the punctuality policy is quaint in the age of instant-feedback blogging and other Internet commentary. This objection is easily countered: debate may be at its most fruitful in the period of time between the immediate online or newspaper opinion and the long-gestating scholarly response. Yet it is important to keep track of changing habits of argument. At the summer meeting of the *Film Quarterly* editorial board, there was discussion of how blogging and "wiki"-style postings might be altering critical practice. In order to examine this question further, this year's call for papers (see the FAQ section of www.filmquarterly.org) invites submission of collaborative texts that explore short-format film criticism in relation to the spontaneity, not to say impetuousness, of Internet writing.

⁂

On November 4, Barack Obama won North Carolina by 14,000 votes, less than one percent of the total, and pollsters may already have determined whether the support video by cast members of *The Wire* (YouTube: "It's Down to The Wire in NC") had any impact on the result. Be that as it may, it is clear that with its fifth and final season the Baltimore crime epic helmed by David Simon at last broke into the mainstream. Christopher Hanson, Marsha Kinder, Ben Walters, and James S. Williams all discuss aspects of *The Wire*, which deserves to be called a TV masterpiece and a major work of recent American fiction in any medium.

Simon was a crime reporter for twelve years and his work with writing partner Ed Burns is notable for its painstaking research. (Interviewed by Richard Beck, he emphasizes the importance of the journalistic ethos to their latest project for HBO, *Generation Kill*, an Iraq War docudrama.) It is interesting, however, that the concluding season of *The Wire* takes fictional storytelling as a topic. Such "metafiction" is not unprecedented in TV drama (there is, for example, the rightly celebrated 2003 "Storyteller" episode of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*), but here it is unusually sustained, even to the detriment of the *The Wire*'s trademark realism. For the plot strand in which Detective Jimmy McNulty (Dominic West) plants evidence of an invented serial killer in order to syphon civic funds which he can then redistribute to cash-strapped investigations is uncharacteristically implausible. "You're working murders that don't even exist," objects Detective Bunk Moreland (Wendell Pierce) in episode 5. "You start to tell the story; you think you're the hero—," McNulty muses ruefully in episode 8, after things begin to go wrong. This strand entwines with two others—spin-doctoring by the mayor's office, a reporter's unscrupulous fabrication of interview material—to consolidate the theme. It is summed up in the last episode by mayoral aide Norman Wilson (Reg E. Cathey). "They manufactured an issue to get paid," he says. "We manufactured an issue to get you elected

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Barroom allusion

Left: *The Wire*. © 2008 Home Box Office. DVD: HBO Home Video. Right: *Homicide: Life on the Street*, episode 24. © 1994 National Broadcasting Company, Inc. DVD: NBC Home Entertainment.

governor. Everybody's getting what they need behind some make-believe."

Pertinent here are *The Wire*'s numerous cross-references to other works. The fifth season alludes not only to past plotlines, as when we see Poot (Tray Chaney) working in a shoe store, but also to a wider story world. In episode 8, actor Richard Beltzer is sitting on a barstool at Kavanagh's. His character, Detective John Munch, migrated from *Homicide: Life on the Street*, the long-running ABC series based on Simon's book about Baltimore police work, to *Law and Order: Special Victims Unit*. "I used to run a bar," Beltzer says, referring to the third season of *Homicide* in which he embarked on the venture together with Detective Meldrick Lewis, played by Clark Johnson, who is cast in *The Wire* as City Editor Gus Haynes . . . and proceeds to come down the stairs.

⁂

Of the films I saw at the London Film Festival, four stood out, one from Israel, another from the U.K., and two from China. Ari Folman's "animated documentary," *Waltz with Bashir*, is based on a video of the director's attempt to recover his memory of being an Israeli soldier near the Sabra and Chatila refugee camp in 1982, when Palestinians were massacred by Christian militiamen. According to the pressbook, the video was developed into storyboards and preliminary illustrations which were then animated using Flash as well as traditional methods, although since there are dream and fantasy sequences in *Waltz with Bashir* I assume that certain sections originated at the storyboarding stage. The result is quite remarkable: the nightmares, hallucinations, and flashbacks are interwoven with talking-head commentary by interviewees (a memory expert, the journalist Ron Ben Yisahi, fellow soldiers) whose animated faces are eerie, lifelike but necessarily not quite themselves. An atmosphere of uncanniness prevails throughout. There are recurrent images of the nocturnal ocean. A yacht sails without lights as "Enola Gay" by Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark blares out of its sound system. An ambushed soldier swims for safety away from shore. And, repeatedly, Folman emerges out of the sea, his expression mysterious and pained; it is never entirely clear whether this is flashback, delirium, or an impressionistic combination of both.

How appropriate is the "documentary" tag for such an unusual film? Certainly *Waltz with Bashir* is not forensic or analytic. So, for example, while Folman makes room for the unproven and fiercely disputed allegation that senior Israeli commanders did not heed warnings that the camp's occupants were in danger, his film does not probe questions of responsibility in the manner of an investigative documentary or, for that matter, a docudrama. Though they both deal with wartime atrocities, *Waltz with Bashir* is thus not like Andrzej's Wajda's solemn, commemorative *Katyn* (recently released by ITI Home Video in a Polish edition that has serviceable English subtitles), which dramatizes the 1940 Katyn Forest mass execution of Polish prisoners by Soviet troops. *Katyn* is a confident, patriotic, and pedagogic telling of history. Disturbed by obscure emotional undercurrents, *Waltz with Bashir* is epistemologically much more uncertain—it could be called "haunted autobiography," closer to fiction than reportage, an experimental memoir somewhat like

Witness to war

Waltz with Bashir. Courtesy Sony Pictures Classics.

Philip Roth's deceptively subtitled *Operation Shylock: A Confession*.

In one dreamlike sequence, Beirut airport is bombed. Folman stands, dismayed, looking out on mayhem through an observation window. The scene is reminiscent of Chris Marker's "photo-novel," *La jetée*, another hybrid work with a detention camp and amnesia. "Of a truth too fantastic to be believed, he retains the meaning: an unreachable country, a long way to go," says Marker's narrator, and *Waltz with Bashir* is also a meditation on the terrors and failures of memory, with Folman remorsefully seeking to make sense of his inability to remember. Eventually a confidant proposes a solution: the guilt is unmerited, a legacy of experiences unrelated to the massacre in Lebanon. But this potentially therapeutic idea falls away as soon as it is formulated; we immediately watch Folman move out of the sea once more, this time walking on until he is faced with the aftermath of the carnage—and then finally we are confronted by contemporary images of the event. The archive footage comes as a shock, but not a catharsis or an epiphany. Nothing seems settled. Distress and horror persist. At the close of this superb film we are, as in *La jetée*, back to the beginning and a dumbfounding anxiety.

Orly trauma

La jetée. © 1963 Argos-Films. DVD: Arte Vidéo (France).

⁂

Hunger is an unsparing account of the death by starvation of the IRA prisoner Bobby Sands (Michael Fassbender) and the first feature by British art star Steve McQueen, the 1999 winner of the Turner Prize. It is a box of tricks. There is no unifying aesthetic beyond bravura stylistic juxtaposition. Sometimes McQueen uses off-angle (or blurred) close-ups, as with shots of bloody knuckles in a basin (which reminded me of Bresson's *L'Argent*); at others he uses very long and wide takes, as when a prison warder sweeps down a urine-soaked corridor. The effect is often startling, but looked at closely the ostentation can seem gratuitous or paradoxically banal. In one shot, the screen is split between (on the left) a slow-motion beating of a prisoner and (on the right) a handsome warder sobbing at the brutality. This is like some "edgy" fashion-shoot spread, too clever—and too melodramatic—for its own good. Later, as Sands wastes away, shots of his emaciated and ulcerous body are intercut with a rustic scene from boyhood. Are we meant to reconcile the anti-psychological body horror with the heartstring-tugging nostalgia? Flashbacks of this kind work well when they are used integrally in films like *Time to Leave* or *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*; in *Hunger* they seem like default ideas, even clichés.

Yet *Hunger* won me over with its verve. At one point we loom and hover over Sands's death bed. The camera movement is neither shaky nor mechanically smooth. Struggling to describe it, the best I can come up with is that it is like the camera has been mounted on the head of a compliant and curious giant cobra. I was fascinated by the weirdness of this serpentine gyration. Yet perhaps the most powerful device in *Hunger* is much less demonstrative. Reversing the censorious tactic adopted by the British Conservative government during this period—forbidding U.K. broadcasters to transmit the speech of Irish nationalists so that one would see Sinn Féin spokespeople on TV but hear nothing of what they said—McQueen uses fragments of Margaret Thatcher's combative speeches ("they have turned their violence against themselves") over images of darkly silhouetted foliage. In these moments, a narrative film that successfully adopts the defamiliarizing mode of conceptual art becomes politically charged, suggesting the ways in which rumor and folk memory, phantom voices of admonition and exhortation, weave fanatic spells.

⁂

Jia Zhang-ke had two magnificent new films in the festival, *24 City* (a mostly fictional account of industrial change centering on a factory in Chengdu, southwest China) and the nineteen-minute *Cry Me a River*, set in an unnamed river town, where reunited college friends are paddled down the waterways in gondola-like boats. The idea that this is a pleasure trip is soon dispelled. Former lovers, now both married to other people, speak quietly about loss and yearning. "I'm with you every day . . . you're the one I dream of," says one. It is less a tourist jaunt than a version of the savage journeying that concerns Jia (see also *Still Life*, reviewed by Yvette Bíró last summer): separation, dispossession, hazardous migration, exile without return. One of the women in *24 City* pays a terrible price in order to reach the Chengdu factory and as a result, she says, "my heart . . . was empty." In these films, human bonds are always in the process of disintegration. There is no stability, the ties cannot hold.

The profound melancholy of Jia's work is alleviated by a playfulness exemplified by the "spaceship" in *Still Life* and, less bizarrely, Joan Chen's performance in *24 City* as a worker who talks about Joan Chen. The clowning stress on artifice offsets the despair. But Jia also demonstrates a virtuoso minimalist lyricism that accentuates the underlying anguish. At the end of *Cry Me a River*, a boat is in the distance as a zoom-out begins so slowly as to be almost unnoticeable. The reluctant retreat occurs again, this time accompanied by plangent music, in a scene in a Retired Persons' Cultural Room in *24 City*. It is as if, each time, the camera were riveted by the pathos of its subjects, as if this were their last chance to be seen, and as if the filmmaker thus moved away with an absolute regret. The zooms continue nevertheless, acknowledging the transience these films lament.

Rob White

Melancholy reunion

Cry Me a River. Courtesy London Film Festival.

POST FESTUM

***In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni* (Guy Debord)**
***Changeling* (Clint Eastwood)**
***Ashes of Time Redux* (Wong Kar-wai)**

Attending film festivals involves a kind of ideological whiplash even more intense than does being a regular cinemagoer, if only because the contradictions are more compressed in space and time. The New York Film Festival's promotional trailer, shown before every screening, says it all. Various famous phrases about the movies pivot in and out of view, mod typeface purling everywhere, beginning and ending with Godard. And then comes the tag: "Indescribable. Unparalleled. Magic." Wait, what? Didn't we just get a dozen terrific descriptions? But cognitive dissonance isn't just an accident, it's the order of the day.

Neither of the Godard quotes is the one which gives this column its name: "This film could be called 'the children of Marx and Coca-Cola.'" Nor did they manage to conjure his great demand: "Let the images flow faster than the money does!" The demarxifying of Godard is an allegory for the history of modern cinema, and for the film festival itself. If one believes in anything political, social, or artistic, it is certain to be contradicted within a few minutes. Just in order to take it all in, one is sorely tempted to believe in nothing but "cinema," beyond description—ambling from screening to screening in a haze of sensual distraction.

This year's NYFF had the good fortune to host the American cinematic debut of Guy Debord's 1978 film with the palindromic title *In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni* (which translates roughly as "we whirl in the night and are consumed by fire"). Long pulled from circulation, it has resurfaced—freshly subtitled—to lead the festival's "Views from the Avant-Garde" showcase. This was only appropriate, as the film is in large part an impossibly elegiac circling back through time to the last meaningful avant-garde, that advance cadre of conspirators and drunkards known as the Situationist International. "A group of people," the film elaborates without embarrassment, determined to "base its real existence on a deliberate rejection of what is universally accepted, and on total indifference to the possible consequences."

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The consequences were mostly devastating, the successes at least as much as the failures. The film offers up the history as a quest played out across Paris and western Europe, across years and across the imagescape.

Prince Valiant appears briefly, as well as Lacenaire from *Children of Paradise*—a film shot heroically in a Nazi-held Paris. That's part of the claim: that the avant-garde, whether artists or militants or both, fights always within an occupied city—occupied if not by armies than by the alien beast of capital.

But the images do not flow very fast at all, and that is the point. The film is largely found footage, both moving and stilled, frozen, spooled out patiently and even blankly. There are newspaper ads for modern living, and great swaths from *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, and an impossibly calm circumnavigation of Venice. Images, the film seems to gather, are merely a form of value; they can no more "flow faster than the money" than clouds can flow faster than wind. And so careful efforts are made to detach the images and the words from the torrent, and to make the detritus of history tell a different story, something that "begins with a game" and ends with a terrible charge into the cannonades of time and domination. "Avant-gardes have only one time; and the best thing that can happen to them is to have enlivened their time without outliving it," murmurs Debord, who killed himself in 1994. Such a pure insistence is foolhardy, and lacking in humility, and uncompromising in a way we all secretly wish to be, in a way that gives definition to the initial concept. *In girum* requires us to use the term *avant-garde* like we mean it.

And then one walks out into the festival and lands in the historic, luscious seats of the Ziegfeld Theatre, where Frank O'Hara used to buy his smokes in the lobby. Was he the avant-garde? What would he have made of *Changeling*, which filled the Ziegfeld more than once during its premier run? He was a big Lana Turner fan; maybe he would have appreciated Angelina Jolie's wave, and the lipstick apparently made from ground rubies and greasepaint.

Jolie plays a single mother in interwar Los Angeles who loses her son, is burdened briefly with a fake son by the cops, and spends the rest of the movie demanding justice and searching for her kid. Based on actual events or not, the plot is silly enough to obviate further detailing. One supposes it

could be written off as chumming for an Oscar: Jolie returns to the psych ward, in a turn begging the title *Mom, Interrupted.* Indeed, the movie's most generous quality is in reminding one of half-remembered films worth revisiting: *Devil in a Blue Dress*, for its old L.A. set designs; *L.A. Confidential*, for its interest in crooked cops and crazed killers as something more than decoration for moralizing; and *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* for taking despair seriously.

If there is anything awe-inspiring about *Changeling* itself (aside from the lipstick) it lies in its one-dimensionality. As has become the hallmark of post-2001 cinema, a child in jeopardy is the only guarantor of significance, and everything spreads outward from there. Cops bad, moms good; politicians bad, crusading preacher good—though John Malkovich can't help himself and renders up just a twitch of ambiguity, which must have driven the director crazy, since nuance is not his strong suit.

One should dispute the saintly status Clint Eastwood has somehow achieved among critics. High plains populist he may be, but of a most unpleasant variety, as far to the right as the last century's worst examples: die rather than let the state do for you, sacrifice yourself for the president, etc. In his oscillating cult of heroic individual and supreme leader, Eastwood is closer to Mussolini than Frank Capra. That reaches toward the core of the problem: it is not a particularly cinematic vision, just an unpleasant dogma that flattens human experience far *more* than the average Hollywood entertainment. And so in *Changeling* we get a moral universe populated by heroic moms and victimized waifs who must at all costs not depend upon the social order, rifted as it is with weakness and corruption; they must do it themselves, with occasional support from faith-larded vigilantes (the real-life Gustav Briegleb, Malkovich's character, was said to be in the pay of the libertarian Better America Federation). The whole thing gives hokum a bad name.

If festival whiplash is confusing, at least there is always a palate-cleanser forthcoming, or more accurately an eyewash. Wong Kar-wai's remix of his 1994 *Ashes of Time* is so comely to look at that it's like growing new eyes. The narrative is all Wong—a meditation on time and memory with events out of sequence and faculties unable to put them in order, as true for the characters as for us. Everyone's beautiful and romance is always in the receding past or never-to-come future.

But it's really cinematographer Christopher Doyle's movie. At his incomparable best here, Doyle's secret weapon is a degree in art history, and he captures the fall of fabric like Lorenzo Lotto. It's astonishing and then some; no one has ever shot fabric like this before, or ever will again, one supposes—not Herb Ritts or Stephane Sednaoui or even Harry J. Wild. The swordsmen's robes, very Miyake-does-the-Middle Kingdom, have the seeming of layered and tailored souls worn on the outside, leading actors in a movie about color, about saturation and blur constantly on the verge of escaping the slippery narrative and just hanging there in space, pure appearance, shimmering in the silver halide aura. The purity of looking competes with the story and gets the better of it. A streak of blood on a light green wall toggles between abstraction and mortality, and so does the film: a martial epic shot in close-up with almost no fighting.

Kung fu couture

Ashes of Time Redux. Photo: Lau Wai Keung and Chan Yuen Kai © 1994, 2008 Block 2 Pictures Inc. Courtesy of Sony Pictures Classics/Film Society of Lincoln Center.

It's based on Louis Cha's *The Eagle-Shooting Horses*, which Wong identified after the screening as "the second bestseller in the history of China, after Mao's little red book." But how could this be true, when the latter was distributed for free by the CP? Wong doesn't claim to be avant-garde; still, he is oddly *post festum*, after the party. Claiming to be nothing but a witty aside, the remark was an exemplary instance of the festival's necessary political blindness. Wong, after all, is Godard without a program: the problematic of the festival scenario encapsulated in a single brilliant director. But then Godard, who would never have botched a joke about the little red book, was nonetheless "the stupidest of the pro-Chinese Swiss," in the words of Debord. It is a tricky thing, history; one wishes to think more of it.

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QUASIMENTARIES

***The Class* (Laurent Cantet)**
***The Windmill Movie* (Alexander Olch)**

These days some unusual films are appearing that have many but not all the attributes of a documentary, and two of them were shown at the 2008 New York Film Festival. What's more, they differed from a "normal" documentary in sharply different ways. Both also revealed the strengths and the possible pitfalls of their offbeat approaches.

The Class (*Entre les murs*) appears to summarize several days of interactions between a French language teacher and a middle-school class of mainly poor and/or immigrant students. The teacher, François (François Bégaudeau), like each of his colleagues who appear in the film, is a real teacher (and author of the book on which the film is based), and the students are all real students; but the events are entirely fictional. Thus sequences involving apparently continuous interaction between the teacher and his students (as also among teachers and between teachers and parents) were in reality filmed with many breaks.

All of *The Class* was filmed within the precincts of a real school building. In fact, a large part of it takes place in a single classroom, with interactions and frequent clashes between the enthusiastic, provocative teacher and the students. This interplay is so well done that it can hold one's attention for a remarkably long time without any further action. Eventually, however, Cantet and Bégaudeau bring in a touch of melodrama. After François angrily reprimands two students for having behaved like "pétasses" (sluts), Souleymane, a student from Mali, loses his temper with the teacher and charges out of the classroom, accidentally swinging his bag against a girl student's head and drawing blood.

This leads to two main consequences. First, some students, including a friend of the injured girl (whose cut is superficial), blame the teacher for provoking Souleymane and causing the incident. Second, a special hearing is held by the school board to decide whether he should be expelled. Souleymane's mother insistently defends him in her native language, but François says nothing. His temper loss is briefly mentioned and condemned, but in a secret ballot the board votes for Souleymane's expulsion.

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The film ends with the last class of the school year. Everything seems peaceful. The teacher asks each student to say what he or she particularly remembered learning during the year, to which all but one reply positively. The last response, however, comes from one of the girls who accused François. She says "I didn't learn anything," but then speaks about having read Plato at home.

Just as there seemed to be a faultline between the teacher's provocative enthusiasm and his loss of temper (followed by his offering no defense of Souleymane), there seemed to be another between the expulsion episode and the peaceful final scene—plus a minor jolt with the girl's worried dissent. The only other film of Cantet's that I've seen, *Time Out* (*L'emploi du temps*, 2001), about a man who's lost his job but pretends to have been hired as a consultant at a U.N. agency, has a similar dissonance between its continual fascination and an occasional sense of being off-key.

Obviously I wouldn't find fault with the events in *The Class* if it were a documentary, but it's fictional—and paradoxically that also accounts for its greatest strengths. The lengthy teaching sequence involves the teacher's continual leaps from topic to topic, sometimes as if on the spur of the moment or because of a student's question or comment, and one may wonder how much the students could remember from it all. Of course, the teaching details are for the viewer's benefit, bringing out the inventive efforts of the teacher and the variety of the students' views and concerns, not for the instruction of the cast members themselves.

Certainly Cantet's decision to spend so much time with one teacher in a classroom of varied and distinctive students works extraordinarily well. I can only compare it unfairly with Audrey Estrougo's *Regarde-moi* (2007), whose main characters are poor white and immigrant young Parisians who live in a sprawling project on the edge of the city. The spatial separation between and within the various buildings of the project cannot carry the same intensity as the confining space of the classroom in *The Class*.

⁂

Alexander Olch's *The Windmill Movie* is an extraordinary tribute to Richard P. Rogers, a film teacher (lastly at Harvard) and filmmaker who died of brain cancer in 2001 at age fifty-seven. Olch, a former student of Rogers, started making the film in 2003 and worked on it, with breaks, until this year. One reason the film took such a long time to prepare is that

Pedagogy tested

The Class. Photo: Pierre Milon. Courtesy Sony Pictures Classics/Film Society of Lincoln Center.

it is based on (and mostly includes the footage of) a film that Rogers had for many years been making of his own life, and when cancer struck he had neither the time nor the strength to edit it. And since it consisted of more than two hundred reels, along with Super 8 film taken by his father, editing it (and fleshing it out with supplementary footage) wasn't easy. The title came more easily: there was a windmill next to Rogers' house on Long Island, and many of his boxes of film were labeled "Windmill."

Whereas *The Class* unfolds entirely within the precincts of a school and a notional year or less, *The Windmill Movie* confronts the viewer with a fifty-year variety of times and places and people, sometimes leaping to and fro within that range. In short, it isn't always easy to know where and when we are and whom we're watching—though that is also part of the film's fascination.

There are two other difficulties. Many viewers, like me, will know nothing about Rogers in advance. There are direct references in *The Windmill Movie* to only two of the dozen or more films he made and little if anything about his work as a teacher of other would-be filmmakers. In filming himself he tends to appear as a dilettante, seemingly detached from the problems of everyday people. It was only after the scene where he's found to have brain cancer that I realized his earlier way of talking had been a pose, since he maintains his light touch even when attempted cures of his cancer fail and he eventually films himself in a mirror as he faces imminent death.

Those who prepared the film faced another problem. They had no idea how Rogers himself would have edited the mass of film he left behind. (Indeed, Olch told me that Rogers said he had no idea how he himself would have edited it.) There are some scenes that Olch added with Rogers' friends Wallace Shawn and Bob Balaban, while Rogers' longtime companion, photographer Susan Meiselas (whom he married after discovering he had cancer), is played by an actress. Not surprisingly, Olch says he found himself in "a strange zone between fiction and nonfiction"— and there are some passages where I had a similar feeling of mystery.

Although there have been many promising films left unfinished for various reasons, including the death of the filmmaker, I can't think of one that was worked on for so long and left in such a raw and unplanned state as Rogers' "autobiography." Now it has been shaped into a form that's sometimes puzzling but ultimately inspiring.

⁂

One other entry at the festival seemed at first to be a candidate for near-documentary status. This was *Gomorrah*, an Italian indictment of the Mafia-like organization known as the Camorra. It is indeed an overwhelming series of examples of the Camorra at their corrupt and bloodthirsty work, and it's based on a book by an author who is under continual police protection for his anti-Camorra writing. Director Matteo Garrone ends the film with a list of statistics about the Camorra's misdeeds, and perhaps he too is in danger and deserves respect. But there's nothing even partly documentary about a film whose crew can record the close-ups of make-believe killings and body disposals without running for their lives.

WILLIAM JOHNSON is a former New York Editor of *Film Quarterly*

VERTIGO

I

The first time—in 1958, during the original release—was not happy. Though the vertigo shot made my head spin deliciously, it furnished my only thrill; the otherwise impenetrable yarn, by turns too slow-moving for my interest or too fast-paced for my understanding, had to be repeatedly explained to me by my mother afterward. I was disappointed at not finding the Hitchcock thriller I already knew, and incapable of appreciating the modernist art film that without warning had stolen its identity. (In this, apparently, I resembled the grown-ups around me; *Film Quarterly*, which, like *Vertigo*, first appeared in 1958, did not review it.) Since then, I have sat many times in movie theaters while *Vertigo* was being projected, have also purchased several versions of the film for my TV, PC, and iPod. Yet despite such various second chances (of which another has just been offered me with Universal's new Legacy Series edition), I have little better idea of what *Vertigo* is about now than I did when I was ten years old; my ignorance has merely got stranger, because less explicable in an adult; it must seem, though it does not feel, like a phony trance. Was this first viewing—bored, restive, and uncomprehending—nonetheless so magnetic that it is drawing me still? Does it return, by some mundane memory trigger or mysterious unconscious agency, to repossess me?

There seems to be, in any event, no losing it. For though I now enter the temple called *Vertigo* with every intention of devotion, I soon start behaving like an ignorant and ill-behaved child made to sit through high mass. Irresistibly, my mind wanders, falls into daydreams or spins off into reminiscences related to the film by only the most finely customized tangents. And when, suddenly and for no good reason, something in the film—a line, a shot, a musical phrase—brings me back from these absent states, I hardly know what I regret more—losing the fiercely vivid pleasure that they afforded, or missing the master key to unlocking *Vertigo*, which I am convinced must have been proffered on screen just after I went off.

Naturally, I make frequent resolutions to watch *Vertigo* more responsibly, in a manner better suited to its status as perhaps the greatest film of them all. But even when I most doggedly concentrate on the images before me, I find myself sidetracked—staring at peripheral details, fixated on private, incommunicable nuances, or held in the grip of a camera movement much too long after it has passed. I am transfixed, for instance, by the pale iridescent steering wheel on Scottie's De Soto Firedome, which looks made from mother-of-pearl rather than plastic, and whose regular stippling seems to prescribe a firm and exact grip, as though, without such clenching, this exquisite thing of beauty would whirl away, out of control. Or I get as excited as a child with a new plaything by Midge's bright yellow Cosco stepstool, with retractable steps, just like the one we had in the kitchen at home, where it once furnished me both a staircase to climb up and a precipice to jump off. Or I marvel at how a clockwise pan of San Francisco yields to a counterclockwise pan of Madeleine's apartment building, conveying the thrilling impression that these two "spinning" shots, though successive, are somehow colliding; and my amazement only increases to find the second pan settling on an image that literalizes just such an imagined smash-up, with Madeleine's Jaguar screen-left (but pointing right) and a one-way street sign screen-right (but pointing left). In short, when I do succeed in focusing on *Vertigo*, all I see is just such a random series of little touches (never the same ones), and this fascination with "the small scenes, the fragments of the mirror" (as Scottie calls the disassembled details of Madeleine's dream) blinds me to even their immediate context, let alone what might hold them together.

Thus do I gaze at the summit of cinema: one eye, aversively farsighted, looks past the screen image to remoter regions of the mind, while the other, intently myopic, sees in this image nothing but small, unintegrated details. But on my most recent attempt at viewing *Vertigo*, a hypothesis occurred to me that, while of no help in correcting my addled eyesight, at least shifted the responsibility for it onto the film itself. Suppose, as I did, that my two impairments were to combine, that the eye that pulled away and the eye that drew forward *looked at the same time*. Wouldn't the resultant vision reproduce the famously disorienting shot used to present Scottie's vertigo, the shot in which the camera tracks back while zooming forward? Perhaps I don't see *Vertigo* because, in the effort to do so, I have contracted vertigo. Not the clinical inner-ear imbalance (from which, merciless in

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my medical ignorance, I used to tease my mother for suffering), but the formal ocular disturbance as defined—and practiced—by Hitchcock's film. And to judge by the symptoms of planar yo-yoing in William Friedkin's new commentary—where he identifies a through street as a cul-de-sac and confuses the tiles on the mission roof with the stones below it—I may not be alone.

II

After all, such distraction would be simply impossible with any other Hitchcock film. In *them*, we always know exactly where to direct our attention. Recall the signature dolly shot in *Notorious*, which sweeps down over the grand reception in progress to rest on a key in Alicia's hand. The camera's smooth, single-minded trajectory enjoins us to skim likewise over the staircase, the chandelier, the faces, the furniture—over everything but this key, which alone merits our scrutiny. Indeed, if some imp of the perverse led us to fix on any of these other things, our contrariness would be rewarded with nothing better than a generic swank-party background. For the most prominent object in a Hitchcock image is typically the most significant one as well. Alicia's key is also "key" in the figurative sense, its visual centrality clearly aligned with its narrative importance. It gets Devlin into the mysterious wine cellar where he proceeds to discover bottles of a vintage plot-thickener called "uranium."

But in *Vertigo*, what is it that we are being asked to look at? "Madeleine" is the general answer to that question, of course, but Madeleine is in fact highly elusive. Even at first sight, Scottie does not see her directly, and after that, he tends to follow her from behind, so that we are only looking at the back of her head—or rather at her hairdo's black hole. Far from ever satisfying our gaze, Madeleine only entices us into trying to see something else, something in or beyond her, through the alluringly dark telescope embedded in her blonde chignon. We may call that something "Carlotta Valdez," but Carlotta is also unstable and fleeting; her face in the portrait differs from that of the figure she becomes in Scottie's nightmare, and in both, her hair is arranged in the same fascinating spiral style.

If the object of our attention is obscure and confused, moreover, so is the narrative logic it normally depends on. For all the garrulity of the exposition, it is never quite clear what following Madeleine is supposed to accomplish. Elster claims that he needs to know where his wife goes before committing her to medical care, but as he seems already well-informed of Madeleine's unconscious identification with Carlotta, of what possible use to him is the banal list of San Francisco sights that is the only other thing Scottie's labors turn up? And by the time that Madeleine has jumped into San Francisco Bay, there is surely sufficient evidence to get her to a doctor. Just as the object's uncertainty implies its ultimate absence, so the plot's implausibility indicates the motivelessness at its core.

No way in

Photo: D. A. Miller.

Accordingly, Hitchcock's suspense in *Vertigo* is deprived of its intelligibility. Either this suspense remains a vague haze, never condensing into its classically well-known forms, or else these same forms become formalities, emptied of any reason for their still rigorous observance. In the forest of giant redwoods, for instance, Madeleine suddenly runs away from Scottie and disappears, it seems, behind one of the tall trees. The scene then develops as a prolonged alternation between shots of Scottie looking for her and shots of the empty forest; astral music comes in to reinforce the ominous, otherworldly mood. But at the end of it all, there is Madeleine discovered standing against a tree just as we had commonsensically first supposed. The suspense, though obvious, is also gratuitous, giving us the impression that we have missed

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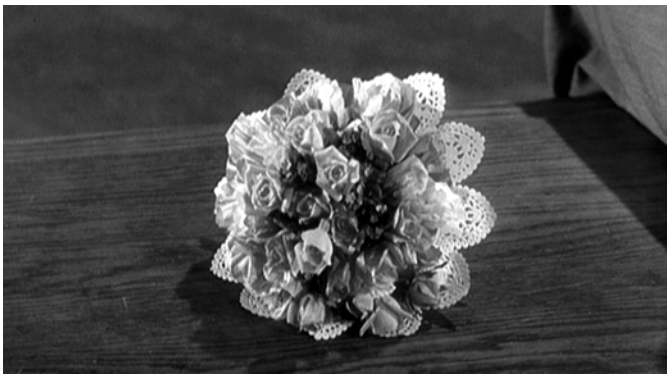


First seven: *Vertigo*. © 1958 Alfred J. Hitchcock Productions Inc./Paramount Pictures Corporation. DVD: Universal Studios. Last one: *Mad Men*, season 2, episode 11. © 2008 American Movie Classics (downloaded via iTunes).

seeing something, or that what we have seen exceeds any possible point to it. No wonder my mind wanders as desultorily as Madeleine seems to do: I can't be sure what proper attention to *Vertigo* comprises, nor how such attention is rewarded. Still, as with Madeleine, some questions remain: Where do I go on my wandering? What takes me away?

III

Watching *Vertigo*, I am seized with a longing to visit San Francisco—an absurd feeling on two counts. For one thing, *Vertigo* renders the touristic idea of San Francisco with a repleteness that should leave nothing to be desired; the Golden Gate Bridge, the Palace of Fine Arts, the Legion of Honor Museum, Coit Tower, Mission Dolores—all shimmer in glorious Constable weather that a tourist seldom sees; and what a tourist always does see—the ignoble mass of his fellow gawkers—has been removed from every view. For another thing, I live in San Francisco; indeed, here I was born, raised, and taken to see *Vertigo* for the first time. What, then, could I possibly hope to see in San Francisco that has not already been given to my view either spectacularly, by the film itself, or mundanely, during my many years of inhabiting the place? But of course, it is from the clash, the mutual interference, of these two reasons that the irrational longing arises. Each San Francisco, by eclipsing my view of the other, makes me yearn to see "again," fully and distinctly, the prospect that it blocks.

Hitchcock's San Francisco (to start there) is a majestic abstraction of resplendent bridges, towers, palaces, and gardens, all grandly isolated, and all sumptuously empty. It is a kind of eerie mirage that, as a character in Wilde once said of San Francisco, "possesses all the attractions of the next world." Remarkably, however, the three main characters, dreamlike themselves, and gliding from wonder to wonder in cars fluent as gondolas, see no more of this unearthly city than their obsessive pursuits strictly require: precious little. No matter how spectacular the scenery at Fort Point or the Legion of Honor, Scottie has eyes for Madeleine only, while she, in making the full round of tourist sights, seems less to be seeing them than to be seeing *through* them to an ulterior world of which they are, at best, obscure intimations. Even Midge, would-be realist, ignores the classic view from her apartment window. The opposite of tourists, *Vertigo*'s characters couldn't care less about seeing the city that Hitchcock has made for them, but most fully depicts without them or behind their backs, in objective panoramas or rear projections.

That privileged class of tourist who is the film spectator should be perfectly positioned to enjoy what the characters miss. Yet despite the unsurpassed clarity of Robert Burks's photography, my vision of it is as negligent, as diverted by obsession, as that of Scottie, secretly watching Madeleine in the car ahead of his, or of Madeleine, still more secretly watching Scottie from her rear-view mirror—or with that eye in the back of her head—so as to prevent him from losing track of her. Always superimposed on *Vertigo*'s San Francisco are extraneous reflections of my own, unbidden memories that, in contrast to sightseers, can no more be banished from Hitchcock's images than Judy's vulgar accent and clothing can be purged from the ideal of Madeleine.

Some such memories are indefinite or even conjectural, shadowy souvenirs of the downtown wandering that I was allowed to do as a boy. But others are quite precise. In the sanatorium where Scottie is treated for "acute melancholia with a guilt complex," I recognize St. Joseph's Hospital where, in 1950s fashion, I had my tonsils removed, and where, after its much later condo-conversion, I lived for a while among buffed gay men who drove jeeps. At I. Magnin's, the high-end department store where Judy is employed, I too once worked, until the day when, whether dizzy from the scent, or just confused in the Christmas rush, I dropped a sample bottle of perfume, which shattered all over the floor. And at Ernie's, about the same time, I did my best to keep my cool while an entire meal, from the Steak Diane to the Cherries Jubilee, was flamed tableside for my prom date and me. Yet whether vague or detailed, the memories inevitably spoil Hitchcock's rigorously curated San Francisco by mock-heroically putting me into it. In the rarefied high-romantic ethos of *Vertigo*, this is not funny.

Recently, then, in an attempt to retrieve Hitchcock's San Francisco in all its unimpinged-upon purity, I treated myself to a thing called the Vertigo Tour, a private guided excursion through the locales of the film. At first it seemed to supply just what I was wanting. My guide would drive me, say, to Mission Dolores, where we inspected the church and its garden, and then, as soon as we were back in the car, we would watch the correspondent scene from the film on a portable DVD player. At the pace we worked, the location never had the time to acquire much independent density; it capitulated easily to its instant virtualization. I was reminded of the series of shots at the Legion of Honor in which Scottie looks at Madeleine while she is looking at the portrait of Carlotta; he sees the posy at Madeleine's side, then sees it held by Carlotta in the portrait; he sees Madeleine's cyclopic coiffure, then sees it on Carlotta, too. These shots seal Scottie into the belief that Madeleine is, or thinks she is, possessed by Carlotta's spirit; and as my guide, following a similar procedure, reduced local sights to their Hitchcockian essence, I

felt sutured into *Vertigo*'s San Francisco as never before. In one case, the location itself seemed to help the process along: the Hotel Empire, where Judy resides in the film, having long since become the York Hotel, was now being transformed once more, this time into the Hotel Vertigo.

But then, my guide offered to take me to a locale never seen in the film, but merely mentioned: the Portals of the Past in Golden Gate Park, a small portico by a lake where, as Elster tells Scottie, Madeleine likes to sit staring into space. I immediately recognized, though I hadn't revisited it since childhood, the lake where my father used to take me to feed "the duckies," who were still there, as Scottie would have said. And there *I* was—confused, distressed, and burdened with the added task of having to conceal these emotions from my guide—back in the raw mental state of being-distracted-from-*Vertigo*. With this difference: I now understood that my state of distraction was a way, albeit a tendentious one, of watching *Vertigo* nonetheless; and that all the while I thought my attention was wandering, it was scrutinizing, it was sifting the film for something that felt just on the verge of appearing on screen. I do not know what to call this thing exactly (me? my Carlotta?), but it must bear on the fact that, during the many years when *Vertigo* had been withdrawn from circulation and was being slowly prepared for its apotheosis, at the end of them, as a peerless cinematic masterpiece—during this Great Confinement, the film was also becoming a sort of filmic madeleine of San Francisco during my childhood. No wonder I can never find Hitchcock's San Francisco in any fullness; I am too busy, in my reveries, looking for my own, as if *Vertigo* were, of all things, a documentary. This is no doubt why I am held spellbound by the rear projections, which, for all their artifice, attest to the most indulgent location-shooting Hitchcock ever allowed himself. It is also why these are never quite satisfying: they never show me that archaic object, whatever it is, which always appears to be just out of sight.

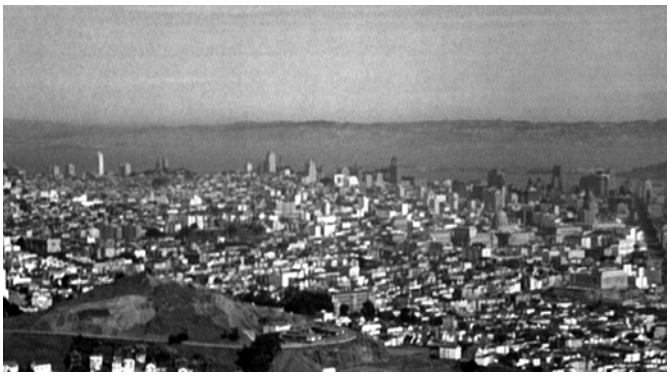
If my desire to find *Vertigo* in San Francisco led me on the Vertigo Tour, my desire to find San Francisco in *Vertigo* took me on another, more simply managed journey: to my parents' house in the Outer Mission—a neighborhood on the wrong side of the tracking shots—in order to see my mother's yellow kitchen stepstool that, still retained, had now been relegated to the basement, near my old bedroom. Belonging to both Hitchcock's fiction and my reality, the chair would be the means of validating the one by the other, the link by which to identify the one *as* the other. (And the chair is not all that peripheral a detail, I reminded myself; when Scottie stands on it, he experiences his first post-traumatic attack of vertigo, and Midge buries her catalogue copy of the "Portrait of Carlotta" beneath a pillow on its seat, almost as if she were interring it there.) Yet this second adventure ended up being as futile as the first: for though I photographed the chair in various promising poses, even moving it back up to the kitchen, nothing made it *look* like the same chair. The resemblance was exact except for one element whose absence cancelled out all the others: fictionality. Only with this—as in a recent episode of *Mad Men*, where the yellow chair reappears in Peggy's lower-middle-class apartment—would the likeness be persuasive. Without it, the chair looked ridiculous, as I did on top of it—or as Midge does when she paints herself, complete with glasses and wry looks, into the portrait of Carlotta.

IV

Eventually I started to suspect that neither my wandering attention to *Vertigo* nor my search for the film off-screen was merely a personal failing; that, in the end, *Vertigo* not only permitted, but also compelled bad spectatorship. Or, at any rate, in *one* of the ends. For *Vertigo* has two endings: the one we know and the one Hitchcock cut from the film during post-production. The latter, called the "foreign censorship ending," may be found among the extras on the Legacy release, where it is introduced with the following advisory: "Hitchcock was required to shoot this extended ending to satisfy the needs of the foreign censorship committee. Were it not for this, he would never have allowed it to be created. Seeing this footage, we can understand that he was absolutely correct." So, with this lame explanation, the censorship ending is itself censored, judged external to Hitchcock's authorship, and wrong for the film in any case; we may see it only on condition that we do *not* see it as a valid or authentic part of *Vertigo*. Similar thinking caused it to be passed over in the Robert Harris/James Katz 1996 restoration work, so that it even *looks* negligible. Yet, though little regarded in both senses of the word, it remains a precious material exhibit of what I should call "unseen *Vertigo*" or "the *Vertigo* just out of sight."

The extended ending takes up where the familiar ending leaves off. From Scottie on his tower, it shifts to Midge in her apartment, where, on the night of the same day, she is anxiously listening to the radio: "Elster was last heard of living in Switzerland, but is now thought to be residing somewhere in the south of France. Captain Hansen states that he anticipates no trouble in having Elster extradited . . . once he is found." This, we suppose, is the moral denouement that a censorship committee might have required; but so feeble

"THE *VERTIGO* JUST OUT OF SIGHT"



Vertigo. © 1958 Alfred J. Hitchcock Productions Inc./Paramount Pictures Corporation. DVD: Universal Studios. (Last two taken from the "foreign censorship ending" included on the Universal Legacy Series DVD.)

a promise of the criminal's punishment is persuasive only in its suggestion that, like Madeleine, his creation, and Scottie, his dupe, Elster too may have started to wander. The announcer himself then divagates to a very different item: "Other news on the local front: in Berkeley, three University of California sophomores found themselves in a rather embarrassing position tonight when they were discovered by Police Officer William Fogarty leading a cow up the steps of Legrand—." Here, Midge turns off the radio, but we have heard enough. We know the mischief intended by this once-common college prank: cows are incapable of walking on steps, which cause them panic and confusion. These wanton boys were seeking to induce a case of what can only be called *bovine vertigo*, the stupid, depsychologized version of Scottie's own predicament. And only now, against this literally unseen "comic relief," does Scottie enter the room; he takes up the drink Midge has mixed for him, and, turning his back on her and us alike, goes over to the window where—for the first time—he looks out, straight ahead, at the view of San Francisco: the end.

In the classical aesthetics referenced by the film's numerous neoclassical architectural forms, the comic relief provided by the woozy cow must seem so out of place as to be deservedly put out of sight as well. To my ill-aspected viewing, though, its value lies precisely in disturbing the *tragic relief* that the authorized ending clearly aims to provide. There, his hands forlornly held out, as if Judy had fallen through their fingers, Scottie looks like a piece of academic sculpture; indeed, his whole doleful attitude has been raised up like a monument and isolated in distinct outline from the rear-projected world around him. Such tragic standing implies a certain revelatory knowledge: Scottie can finally look down from on high and see clearly; he has been, in Friedkin's final words as commentator, "cured of his acrophobia." Corrected, Scottie's vision would now approximate the transcendental gaze often assumed by the camera in classic cinema—indeed, his POV, were it given here, would be an overhead shot like those Hitchcock himself frequently used to play up his mastery. In his despair, Scottie at least enjoys one comfort: a tragic hero, he is no longer a dizzy one.

By contrast, the extended ending removes him from the ennobling tower platform and brings him home to Midge's flat—and implicitly, to a drunk-and-depressed life with this altogether "wrong" version of Madeleine. But the important difference here is the return of San Francisco, which, for a change, we're not allowed to see very well. The nocturnal opacity is apt, for in this spectacle of a city as latent with vertigo as the wood decors of *Marnie* are with red, Scottie is also gazing at the matrix of Madeleine's vacant-eyed madness, which we may now recognize as his vertigo's extreme form. As Elster in fact tells Scottie, Madeleine's derangement began on the day when she saw San Francisco for the first time. "She was like a child come home. And when she came upon something unchanged, something that was as it had been, her delight was so strong, so fiercely possessive! These things were *hers* . . . Then one day a great sigh settled on her, and the cloud came into her eyes." Or rather, these are his words from the screenplay in which, unseen, he was scripted to voice them while Scottie was trying, and failing, to see Madeleine full-on at Ernie's. Hitchcock eliminated the speech along with the ending that so evocatively correlates to it. Otherwise, under the aegis of "San Francisco," *Vertigo* would have ended by insisting on a certain *cloudy* quality that abides in Scottie's looking, its unexhausted and even reawakened capacity for drifting into states of fascination, distraction, bewilderment, blindness—in short, for seeing badly.

"It's not funny," Scottie says of the portrait of Midgelotta, but of course, as no audience ever fails to prove, it *is*; Midge herself is a bit giddy with giggling as she finishes it up. And her first response to Scottie's assignment from Elster—to the plot's most basic assumption—has been to laugh out loud: "Oh, come on!" Similarly, the extended ending brings out the vertiginous farce, half Feydeau, half Punch-and-Judy, that underlies—and undermines—*Vertigo*'s towering tragedy. In doing so, this ending mounts a deadly *un*serious resistance to the desire for significance that marks not only *Vertigo*, but also, more wholeheartedly, its forbiddingly solemn critical celebration. Far from undertaking a cure, it reinstates the impairments of sight and sense that have been inextricable from Hitchcock's strange narrative, and whose idiosyncratic equivalents in any given viewing may hold the key to our common embarrassment in following *Vertigo*'s drift.

The author gratefully acknowledges Mr. Jesse Warr, his guide on the Vertigo Tour.

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DVD DATA *Vertigo*. Director: Alfred Hitchcock. © 1958 Alfred J. Hitchcock Productions Inc./Paramount Pictures Corporation. Publisher: Universal Studios/Universal Legacy Series. $26.98, 2 discs.

GONE FISHIN'? ROSSELLINI'S *STROMBOLI*, VISCONTI'S *LA TERRA TREMA*

PAUL THOMAS ARGUES THAT ROSSELLINI'S REALISM, WHICH NEVER RENOUNCES "THE FLASH OF DRAMATIC INTERRUPTION," IS MORE COMPELLING THAN VISCONTI'S

Roberto Rossellini once said that "neo-realist reality is incomplete, official, and entirely reasonable; but the poetry, the mystery, everything that completes and enlarges tangible reality, is completely missing." At one level, this observation is unexceptionable, or at least hard to dissent from. It is a matter of record that Italian directors, in what turned into a minor Italian industry for a while, became adept at denial, or more pointedly at insisting with all due emphasis that the "real," hardcore neo-realists were those other than themselves (much as when we complain about tourists overrunning and despoiling the scenery, "tourists" are always somebody else, and we ourselves are by contrast voyagers or intrepid wayfarers). At another level, however—at the level I should like to occupy here—Rossellini's words are words to ponder. They admit of a variety of interpretations.

It is striking (if we remain within that broadly but elusively "neo-realist" ambit) that these are words that could in the 1940s have proceeded from Visconti too, though they would have meant something very different. Visconti's way of "completing" and "enlarging" reality is quite different from and irreducible to Rossellini's, as can be seen in Visconti's *Ossessione* (1942), where there is no poetry, no mystery, and where "reality," as David Thomson has pointed out, by becoming heavy, meaty, and gross, is if anything diminished. The heaviness of Visconti's *La terra trema* (1947), however, takes a quite different (and rather more interesting) form. I shall argue here that where Visconti's leitmotif is process and historical transformation (*trasformismo*), Rossellini's is the flash of dramatic interruption. Rossellini's way of breaking out of the contemplative stance—or the director's posture as unmoved mover—that neo-realism can imply was in his earlier films to shatter "reality" into fragments, fragments that would pierce the spectator's awareness and make complacency impossible—impossible for spectator, actor, and director alike. The momentary, the break in construction, the abrupt interruption of process and expectation—these are among the things that stay with us. The shooting (double entendre intended) of Pina (Anna Magnani) from the back of the truck in Rossellini's *Open City* (1945), the drowning of the partisans in the Po sequence of his *Paisà* (1946): to see these charged episodes is to remember them. They don't let go. They become inscribed on our memory—inscribed because Rossellini had an almost uncanny way of inscribing them there.

These are not isolated examples of what Rossellini—and Rossellini alone, in a sense—could do. Each points beyond itself, in the direction of that oddly complex exercise in how to look at and really watch a film, *Viaggio in Italia* (1953), which is organized around a sequence of them. This is particularly the case in the instance of the proleptic one I should like to examine here, the one that also lends itself to comparison with Visconti's *La terra trema*: the tuna-fishing sequence in *Stromboli, terra di Dio* (1950). To see why this latter comparison springs to mind we must first stand back, take our bearings, and think about setting. That *l'Italia meridionale*, where both *La terra trema* and *Stromboli* are set, went through none of the turmoil of Resistance and enjoyed few of the fruits of Liberation is an often-told tale that needs no rehearsal here. Liberation in Sicily signified one more changing of the guard more than anything else: one more invasion, one more change at the helm, to be followed in short order by the return of the Mafia, successive *ricorsi* into corruption, and the recrudescence of seemingly intractable social problems, the same problems that had long been the despair of generations of reformers.

One generalization that can safely be made about our elusive neo-realists is that the south was, by and large, off-limits to them. Apart from Rossellini, who had set one episode of *Paisà* in Sicily, only Visconti and Pietro Germi (*In nome della legge*, 1948) actually went there, Visconti doing so (unlike Germi and unlike Rossellini on the isle of Stromboli) for avowedly political reasons. Following in the footsteps of

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On the waterfront

La terra trema. © 1948 Universalia. Photo: University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive.

Carlo Levi and Elio Vittorini, he went to Sicily in 1947 with a small stipend (and a rather larger flurry of publicity) from the PCI, the Partito Comunista Italiano, ostensibly to shoot a short documentary. (Since *Ossessione* five years earlier, Visconti had made only a rather cursory sequence for a 1945 compilation film, *Giorni di gloria*, jointly directed by *Ossessione*'s editor, Mario Serandrai.)

There is another, more pointed, less contextual reason for comparing Rossellini's fishermen with Visconti's. But before turning to this, more needs to be said about the former's tuna-fishing sequence. It obviously lends itself to comparison with *Viaggio in Italia*: in each case the action is refracted through the reaction on screen of an actress, and in each case the actress in question is Ingrid Bergman. Rossellini alone among directors of Bergman educed and drew upon Bergman's remarkable capacity to show us what it felt like for her to be shaken up and prised loose from her expectations, to be so visibly affected by something she never imagined she could experience. This observation about what Rossellini saw in and about Bergman as an actress does much to explain why *Viaggio in Italia*, which is orchestrated around a sequence of such moments, works as well as it does; but when applied in a more finite, more prismatic and concentrated way, not to the overwrought volcanic climax of the film, but to the tuna-fishing sequence in *Stromboli*, it implies its own limits. Here Rossellini sensed what Visconti never for a moment proved able to take on board: that less is more. Rossellini knew he didn't need conventional cut-away reaction shots to convey how Bergman reacts to the sight of those gelatinous, monstrous tuna, thrashing about in their death throes inside

the huge trap his fishermen had spent eight laborious days in the sun setting up for them. We know how seeing this registers with Bergman, and with Rossellini too, because we know—how, given the sheer power of the sequence, could we *not* know?—how seeing it registers with us.

Rossellini is of course showing us what the fishermen of Stromboli *do* as well as Ingrid Bergman's reaction to it—which is to say that Rossellini, a director who was no Marxist, a director who eschewed Marxism, was nevertheless concerned, in his own way, to proceed from the point of production. By contrast, Visconti's *La terra trema*, which unlike *Stromboli* is a film *about* fishermen, brackets their process of production as it parades its director's Marxism. Visconti never shows his fishermen fishing at all. He confines the action of the film within Aci-Trezza, the Sicilian village that environs his fishermen; his camera never strays outside its limits. As spectators, we too remain for two hours and forty minutes within its confines, bounded as these are by the mountains and the sea, with the *faraglioni*, the needle-like rocks in the bay, standing as sentinels seeing to it that there is no escape. For the duration of the film—and no one would claim that this is an entertaining passage of time—we are immersed in the experience of Aci-Trezza as the villagers themselves experience it.

We look out to sea with the black-garbed women—women who resemble a chorus in an ancient Greek tragedy—waiting for their men. But we never set sail. Our view, like that of the women, is landlocked. Strangers to Aci-Trezza make the occasional appearance, passing through. They are as alien to us as they are to the villagers themselves. Visconti makes no effort to identify these strangers or account for their presence. Who is the mysterious man in the raincoat, the trilby, the plus fours? We are not told—though the facts that he is so free with his American cigarettes, and that Antonio's younger brother Santo disappears with him, presumably to the city, suggest that he is up to something illicit, and hint at the world of *Rocco and His Brothers* (1960). The aged countess who materializes as the fishing boats are being blessed may be a figure who crops up again in other, later Italian films (those of Fellini as well as those of Visconti himself). But again hindsight is of no benefit here. Here, in Aci-Trezza she looks (and feels) out of place, at odds with the place, which is how the villagers themselves see her.

And to these villagers even the private—let alone the putatively urban and decadent—has no real referent. Life in Aci-Trezza is lived in the public eye, right down to the minutest gesture: Nicolas's habit of cracking walnuts in the palm of his hand, the tune whistled by Don Salvatore, the chief of police, as he saunters across his domain. In keeping with this melting down of the public/private distinction, the visual style of *La terra trema* is a law unto itself. Visconti uses his camera purely to create a continuity of space within the confines of the village. There are no abrupt cut-away shots. Camera movement is used very sparingly: forward and backward tracking shots to portray the illness and death of the grandfather, minimal pans to show the denizens of the Valastro household packing anchovies. Only once is there a more sustained, more elaborate camera movement, and even here the camera is subservient throughout to the movement of a character along the beach, weaving and bobbing in and out with him as he tries to make sense of the haggling and bargaining as the day's catch is negotiated with the (presumably rapacious) merchants.

Most striking of all is the fact, duly pounced upon by André Bazin, that Visconti uses depth of field with perfect consistency. Every shot in *La terra trema*, interiors as well as exteriors, seems to be set to infinity, the better to meld together subject and object, plot and setting, character and environment. Everything in the frame—everything in the *film*—is set within a visual field analogous to the human eye. Nothing is contingent, nothing fetishized; portrayal is never presentation, just rendition. The effect (to this very day) is stunning—if not exactly at odds, or in creative tension, with the celebrated longueurs of the film. Every plane, every texture, every gesture hits the viewer's eye in the same way. And this gives *La terra trema* an elemental character, as though it were not shot or filmed so much as etched into the village that is its setting and subject matter.

There is an intransigence, an utter unwillingness to compromise, at work here. Everything we see has to it a plasticity and substance that is all its own and nothing but its own. Things and people all exist on the same continuum, the same spectrum, and the spectrum is social and natural, public and private, interior and exterior, all at the same time. *La terra trema* is not only unprecedented in the history of cinema; it is unrepeatable. To call it *sui generis* is to say that it is a film, that it is a kind of film, which could only have been made once. Whether this uniqueness is a strength as well as a weakness is of course another question altogether. What Bazin never adequately nails down in *What Is Cinema?*'s discussion of *La terra trema* is that while Renoir's depth of focus—and his desire to make movement of the camera subservient to the movement of the character—imply Renoir's pronounced moral tolerance for his characters, this is not what these devices imply in *La terra trema*. For "devices" is what they become, and is all they can remain, once Visconti sees fit to use them.

Visconti in *La terra trema* may have been through with *Ossessione*, but he was not through with obsessiveness. What

STROMBOLI, TERRA DI DIO: FISHING FOR TUNA

© 1950 Berit Film/RKO Radio Pictures. DVD: Koch Media (Germany).

LA TERRA TREMA:
VILLAGE LIFE, DEPTH OF FIELD

© 1948 Universalia. DVD: BFI (U.K.).

was to have been a short documentary morphed in the event, and with all deliberate speed, into a proposed mammoth epic about the condition of poor workers, peasants and fishermen in Sicily. Of three interlinked "episodes" only the first, which still bears the title "Episodio del mar," ever saw the light of day. (The title of the film is a reference not to a volcano—the volcano is at the end of Rossellini's *Stromboli*—but to the peasant episode that never got made; Visconti retained it because he thought it could be stretched to cover social insurrection too.) Visconti at all events was subsequently to insist that the shape *La terra trema* took derived from the changes made to the original scenario during the shooting of the film, but not just under the pressure of circumstance or *la force des choses*. He insisted, more specifically, that it was the fishermen themselves who impressed upon Visconti and his crew a recognition of the disjuncture between nature, which is hard, and human convention, which is also unjust, cruel, and changeable. Visconti added with a flourish that he simply listened to the fishermen, who needed no direction as actors at all. This claim—a claim *à thèse*, designed to demonstrate the integrity of the fishermen's view of themselves—may have inscribed Visconti within the neo-realist canon. But it smacks of grandstanding all the same. Be this as it may, Visconti's presentation of *l'espèce ouvrière* undercuts itself anyway. Because he brackets the work, the process of production, that is its basis, *La terra trema* has a void at its core.

Once again, comparison with Rossellini is apropos. Rossellini ignores *l'espèce ouvrière* as such. His fisherman, as he emphasized in interviews about *Stromboli*, are simply hostile, sullen, and resentful. Yet there is a sense in which he tells us more about *l'espèce ouvrière* than Visconti does, simply by trying less hard. Rossellini, one might say, gets there despite himself—can there be any doubt that his fishermen on Stromboli have a great deal to be resentful about?—while Visconti's striving for effect makes his own goal the more elusive. While Rossellini enjoyed the advantage, a considerable advantage, of having Ingrid Bergman as a way into the world of the fishermen, Visconti appears by contrast to have self-consciously operated on the assumption that no such entrée was needed, and that his fishermen would speak and act for themselves, just like that.

But documentary and agitprop have never sat well together, and do not sit well together in *La terra trema*. This means that while *Stromboli* was as ill-fated a project as Eisenstein's *Que Viva Mexico!* (1932), or Welles's *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942) had been, and for many of the same reasons, *La terra trema* may have been a more ill-fated project in a quite different sense. *Stromboli* got the kind of Hollywood mauling and butchering it did not deserve; *La terra trema* set the stage for Visconti's subsequent career by not getting the kind of editing it needed. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith's fine book on Visconti is by no means wide of the mark when it identifies "a faint aura of aesthetic indulgence" in *La terra trema*. Would that this aura had remained as "faint" throughout Visconti's later output.

Nor indeed is Nowell-Smith wide of the mark when he observes that "the trajectory of Visconti's career sweeps in a wide arc around the area generally known as neo-realism." Much the same could be said, *mutatis mutandis*, of Rossellini's career too, and the arc in any case has to be wide enough to encompass Renoir too. Renoir and Rossellini, if we are to judge from interviews and exchanges, enjoyed a considerable, sustained, and warm personal rapport. But Visconti's career had intersected with Renoir's earlier on. That he was first introduced to Renoir by Coco Chanel—in the heady atmosphere of the Front Populaire, and in the wake of *La vie est à nous* and *Le crime de Monsieur Lange* (both 1935), yet!—is almost too good a story to be true. Visconti, for the record, designed the costumes for *Une partie de campagne* (in which M. Dufour and the hapless Anatole—yes!—go fishing), but when the rains set in at Montigny, and Renoir abandoned the project for Épinay where *Les Bas-fonds* (also 1936) was shot, Visconti was involved in some unspecified way, helping on the set. And when Renoir arrived in Italy in 1939 to make *Tosca* (another ill-fated project), it was Visconti who introduced him to Giuseppe de Santis, Cesare Zavattini, Vittorio de Sica—and to Roberto Rossellini. On his way out of Italy once war was declared, Renoir gave Visconti a copy of James M. Cain's *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, the literary source for *Ossessione*. Which is to say that the rest, as the saying goes, is history—a history perhaps presided over, and not at all benignly in Visconti's case, by Hegel's "cunning of reason."

It was of course in Renoir's nature to give away more than he could ever have got back in return. That Renoir himself knew this can be seen, not just from *Toni* (1934), the film that almost single-handedly inspired Italian neo-realism—and which had portrayed a French Midi every bit as unlovely and charmless (no Marcel Pagnol he) as Rossellini's Stromboli and Visconti's Sicily were also to prove. It can also be seen in Renoir's casting of himself as Octave in *Rules of the Game* (1939), for it's what Octave knew about himself too. But here we risk plumbing waters too deep for one brief essay.

Dedicated to the memory of Michael Rogin.

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ABSTRACT Rossellini's dramatic contrivances in *Stromboli*, especially the performance of Ingrid Bergman, contribute more authenticity to this picture of a fishing village than does Visconti's allegedly more documentary approach to the same subject.

KEYWORDS neo-realism, Luchino Visconti, Roberto Rossellini, *Stromboli, La terra trema*

HISTORICAL MEDITATIONS IN TWO FILMS BY JOHN GIANVITO

JONATHAN ROSENBAUM ON AN ACTIVIST FILMMAKER'S MODULATIONS OF RAGE AND SORROW, LYRICISM AND AGITPROP

It's been gratifying to see the almost instant acclaim accorded to John Gianvito's beautiful, fifty-eight-minute *Profit Motive and the Whispering Wind* (2007), especially after the relative neglect of his only previous feature-length film, the 168-minute *The Mad Songs of Fernanda Hussein* (2001).

The more recent film—a meditative, lyrical, and haunting documentary about grave sites that won the *grand prix* at the Entervues Film Festival in Belfort in 2007 and both a Human Rights Award and a special mention at the Buenos Aires Festival of Independent Film in 2008—also received an award at the Athens International Film and Video Festival in Ohio and was named the year's best experimental film by the National Society of Film Critics. (Full disclosure: I nominated *Profit Motive* for the last of these awards, and headed the jury of the same Buenos Aires film festival in 2001, which gave *The Mad Songs* its top prize.)

The Mad Songs focuses on the irreparable effects of the first Gulf War in 1991 on three separate powerless people in New Mexico (which is where the film in its entirety was shot). *Profit Motive* focuses on the grave sites of several dozen heroes of progressive struggles throughout American history. These topics are of course quite different, yet the differences between the films aren't nearly as substantial as they might initially appear to be. Both are predicated on and filmed around subjects that are physically absent—the Persian Gulf in *The Mad Songs*, the dead heroes of *Profit Motive*—and ones that viewers are invited to imagine, think about, and mourn in some fashion. In fact, I think both films are enhanced and complicated immeasurably as soon as one sees them in relation to one another rather than as separate and isolated forays. Both films are dedicated to examining political struggles in the U.S. and how these struggles are emotionally, intellectually, and historically assimilated.

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Never morbid, and too gentle to qualify as strictly didactic, *Profit Motive* invites us to accompany Gianvito on a casual, fact-finding tour of American history that's as much concerned with what is lost as what is found. It was shot over the course of three summers whenever Gianvito wasn't teaching; the 16mm Bolex he used prevented him from filming any image continuously for any longer than twenty-five seconds, although he managed to disguise the few cuts he made on a few occasions when he needed to accord the viewer more reading time.

He includes in his pantheon such famous figures as Thomas Paine, John Brown, Henry David Thoreau, Chief Crazy Horse, Frederick Douglass, Susan B. Anthony, Harriet Tubman Davis, Eugene Debs, Mother Jones, Emma Goldman, Medgar Evers, Lorraine Hansbury, Malcolm X, John Dos Passos, Paul Goodman, Paul Robeson, and Dorothy Day as well as a virtually equivalent number of unknown or lesser known names, deliberately goading our curiosity to learn more about them. (One critic has expressed skepticism to me about the absence of certain key figures, such as Martin Luther King, but it's important to note that Gianvito's selection remains highly personal without in any way aspiring to exhaustiveness.)

At first glance, Gianvito appears to have gone from boiling, impotent rage about a few marginalized victims and dissidents in *The Mad Songs* to a kind of hushed, mourning tranquility in *Profit Motive* as he ponders the lives and memory traces of a good many activists—all of whom appear to have had a far greater historical impact than the characters in *The Mad Songs* (even though their remains are in mainly unremarked locations). This may help to account for the much wider and warmer appreciation accorded to the latter film in both the U.S. and abroad, despite the fact that *The Mad Songs* has been available on DVD (issued by the small label ELF, or Extreme Low Frequency) since 2005. But of course a radically different change in political climate since early 2001 has also surely had a lot to do with the respective receptions

Desert Storm toys

The Mad Songs of Fernanda Hussein. © 2001 A Traveling Light Production. DVD: E.L.F.

of both films—more, I would argue, than any particular change in Gianvito's politics or in his measured mastery of framing and editing. The distance traveled from the embrace of the American public of the first Gulf War in 1991 and the same public's eventual (if belated) recoil against the occupation of Iraq a decade-and-a-half later is considerable, but this is a journey that is in some ways implicitly recorded in the juxtaposition between Gianvito's two features.

Both films are the poetic and pantheistic expressions of a committed leftist, a fiercely determined independent ready to brook all obstacles, and a passionate cinephile with an extensive curatorial and programming background, known particularly for his work at the Harvard Film Archive. (The second section of the three-part *Mad Songs* is titled, "Orphans of the Storm.") Both films can be said to have overall structures that seemingly move from isolated and lonely individuals to a massive and potent collective experience—though one should add that the single collective experience viewed at the end of *The Mad Songs* is regarded far more darkly and complexly than the celebratory montage of footage from various protest marches in Boston, New York, and Washington, D.C. concluding *Profit Motive*, which relate to the Iraqi war, immigrant rights, and gay rights, among other issues—footage played against throbbing drum beats that is clearly and effectively employed for agitprop and rallying purposes. Furthermore, both films employ a kind of stylistic bricolage that can shift abruptly from meditative lyricism to passionate agitprop and from conventional documentary to musical interludes, art and literary references, and personal experimental filmmaking verging on abstraction.

In *The Mad Songs*, Gianvito can also shuttle with some regularity between conventional documentary and conventional fiction when he isn't intricately mixing the two, or veer off into a brilliant and devastating montage sequence devoted to Desert Storm war toys and various things inscribed on them (e.g., "not recommended for children under three years old"; "Eat lead, Cobra!"; "Let's party!"). In *Profit Motive*, he can suddenly make room for brief flashes of discontinuous and seemingly unrelated animation (his own) punctuating his live-action footage. Yet for all their eclecticism, both films are principally emotional rather than intellectual experiences.

Read superficially, both films are susceptible to the accusation of belonging to a leftist syndrome, "the ennobling of victimization," astutely analyzed by Thom Andersen in his essay "Red Hollywood": "The ennobling of victimization is dangerous, I think, because it requires the victims to keep in their places to maintain their moral claims. If they revolt they must be defeated if they are to keep our sympathy and indulgence. They must remain victims. When Castro's rebels in Cuba and the Sandinistas in Nicaragua won their revolutions, they immediately forfeited the considerable goodwill their seemingly hopeless struggles had earned them in the United States."[1] Citing Robin Blackburn ("Bourgeois sociology only begins to understand modern revolutions in so far as they fail"), Andersen goes on to critique from this vantage point the romanticizing and glorifying of "revolutionary defeats" in such revered political films as *Viva Zapata!* (1952), *The Battle of Algiers* (1967), and *Burn!* (1970).

In fact, *The Mad Songs*, by centering on three figures who are principally seen as victims, is theoretically more open to this charge than *Profit Motive*, which is more concerned with political struggle per se than with either success or failure. But one must also acknowledge that *The Mad Songs* is largely conceived as a kind of therapeutic gesture, an attempt at healing—comparable, mutatis mutandis, to something like *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946). As Gianvito said to Ray Privett in an interview, "I feel that to some extent the Gulf War is like this monster in the closet that we don't talk

about, but about which somehow in our conscious or unconscious minds we carry a lot of shame and unresolved feelings. And I think people know that. The rapidity and intensity with which it unfolded and the rapidity with which it vanished left the country traumatized. And unless we face up to and examine those traumas, we will continue to behave in more and more wounded manners."[2]

I should confess that my gratitude for *The Mad Songs*—which is part of what led me to lobby successfully for it being awarded the jury prize in Buenos Aires—is closely tied to its therapeutic power. Gianvito himself says that he made that film in order "to keep [himself] from going crazy": "The whole thing emerged out of inarticulate rage I carried within me, not only during the Persian Gulf War but through the years that followed, as I progressively learned more and more about what had in fact transpired during the war and its unfolding consequences on the lives of so many people."[3] In order to make it, Gianvito had to travel repeatedly from his home in Massachusetts to New Mexico, which he selected as his location largely because of its physical resemblance to the Persian Gulf.

For me, the personal effect of this feature was almost like hearing a cry of shared pain and rage after a decade of deafening silence. The problem wasn't simply that so many friends and family members, virtually all of them liberals, supported the war without qualification (as some of them would also do the Iraqi invasion, at least before its stated motives proved to be spurious); it was that so many of them were positively gleeful about it, even after admitting in their euphoria that it entailed killing a substantial number of innocent civilians. For me this offered early glimmers of a terrifying conviction that persists for many Americans today—that we can not only "liberate" countries we know next to nothing about, but also that we can confidently define our military goals while remaining indifferent to the wills and lives of the people we are supposedly devoted to liberating. (It's important to stress that the principal reason given by editors at the *New York Times* for rejecting an op-ed piece by John McCain in summer 2008 was his refusal or inability to pinpoint what he meant by a military "victory" in Iraq. To all appearances, the operative phrase in his vocabulary on this topic is "with honor," which clearly alludes to the welfare of Americans, not Iraqis.) Given such bloodlust and such a glib desire to remain uninformed (as reflected in a TV clip in *The Mad Songs* where we see TV talkshow host Arsenio Hall quip in 1991 that "Iraqi intelligence" is an "oxymoron"—a "bright" observation that obviously required no illustration or backup to get rounds of laughter and applause), it's hardly surprising that so many were easily persuaded to invade Iraq on a flimsy pretext in the second Gulf War.

The three fictional stories of *The Mad Songs* intersect only twice—or possibly three times, an ambiguity the film prefers to leave open. The title heroine is a young Latina (Thia Gonzales, the only professional in the cast) in Los Lunas, separated from her Arab husband (who returned to Egypt when he couldn't find work), whose two children are killed because of their surname shortly after the outbreak of the war. A teenage boy in Santa Fe named Raphael (Dustin Scott) is so alienated by his parents' intolerance of his antiwar sentiments and activism that he leaves home and becomes a street person. (Gianvito has a cameo as one of Raphael's teachers, someone who shares his beliefs.) And Carlos (Robert Perea), a Chicano and vet returning to his home in Pecos, is so troubled by his experiences in Saudi Arabia, including some atrocities he participated in, and by such consequences of his service as losing his former job and a rash that appears to derive from Agent Orange, that he finds it easier to relate to the two hookers he hires than to his loyal girlfriend.

The first two of these plots clearly intersect when one of Raphael's friends reads aloud a news story about Fernanda Hussein, describing some of the aftermath of her own story. (Having become mentally unstable, she's arrested for the murder of her own children and subsequently released, then disappears and reportedly has become homeless, either in Mexico or near the border). Much later, she reappears at the home of an old friend, having by now regained her sanity. And toward the beginning of the film's final sequence, at a large fiesta held in Santa Fe in which an ancient ritual known as Zozobra takes place (featuring a gigantic burning effigy, and for me evoking some accounts of the Mexican Day of the Dead), the first two plots intersect a second time when Fernanda is one of the passing members of the crowd who signs Raphael's antiwar petition.

Less conclusive but highly suggestive is an earlier moment, in a canyon, that takes place before Fernanda's first reappearance, when Carlos, in a hysterical and frustrated rage after trying to describe his wartime experiences to his girlfriend, starts to rape her, and his attention is suddenly drawn away by an eerie and sustained cry of misery that he hears resounding through the open spaces and that he can't identify. Whether or not this is one of the mad songs of the title and belongs to Fernanda is left entirely up to our imaginations.

This is a fairly simple, even simplistic schema for a lengthy narrative feature, and some of the execution of it is rudimentary. But even though *The Mad Songs* can be described in some ways as an amateur production, it arguably has the kind of amateur credentials called to mind by filmmakers as diverse as Jean Cocteau, Emile De Antonio, Robert Kramer, and Jean Rouch. And even if it begins in rage, it

(Gianvito's cameo is top left.) © 2001 A Traveling Light Production. DVD: E.L.F.

concludes, in the powerful and cathartic Zozobra sequence, with intimations of sorrow, mystery, simple curiosity, and awe as Gianvito steadily contemplates, through the giant burning figure and its orgiastic effect on a large crowd, all the things he has been railing against for past two and a half hours. In some respects, this sequence recalls his earlier screed against war toys (which intersperses a lavish fireworks display with a comparable rhythmic effect), but here the tone is much more detached and mellow, and the aforementioned emotions—awe, curiosity, mystery, sorrow—dominate. And these are more or less the same emotions with which *Profit Motive* begins.

⁂

As previously noted, the main focus of *Profit Motive* is grave sites and markers scattered across the U.S. and their various inscriptions, all of them belonging to heroes and/or victims of progressive struggles from the sixteenth century up through the twenty-first. These sites and markers are all cited in the final credits like a cast list, and they seem fairly evenly divided between relatively known and relatively unknown figures. They progress from the colonial period and early slave revolts to the present day—all the way from Anne Hutchinson (1591–1649), banished from the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1638 for maintaining that ordinary people could interpret the Bible on their own (though killed with her family in Long Island over a decade later, by Native Americans, simply for being in "the wrong place at the wrong time,"[4] as Gianvito put it in an interview with Benjamin Strong), and Mary Dyer (c. 1611–1660), a "witness for religious freedom" hanged on the Boston Common in 1660, to I. F. Stone (1907–1989), buried with his wife, and César Chávez (1927–1993).

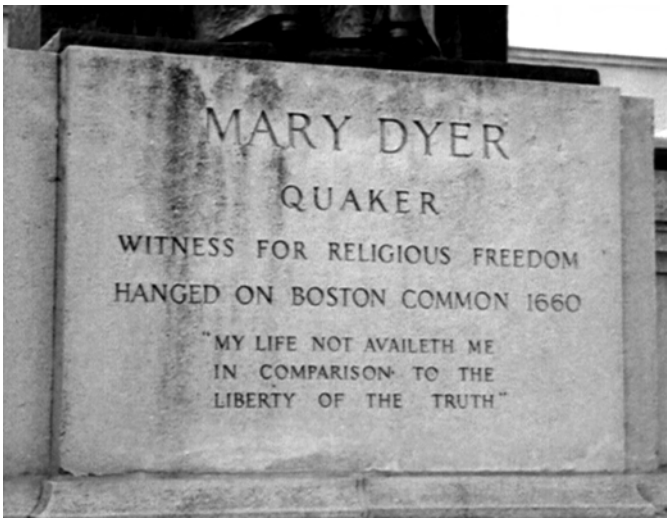
Most of the names and struggles are taken from Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States: 1492–Present*, which Gianvito credits as his inspiration and dedicates the film to. The film's epigraph (by Claire Spark Loeb, a name unknown to me) is, "The long memory is the most radical idea in America"; this is immediately followed by the sound over black leader of an 1894 recording of a Native American chant, "Kiava Ghost Dance No. 12," transliterated and then translated in subtitles.

In the film's opening stretches, Gianvito is even more attentive to the inscriptions and markings of time and weather on gravestones than he is to the man-made inscriptions, the words and art, found on the same objects. That is to say, the lives celebrated here initially appear to be almost stumbled-upon incidental data in locations that are already being regarded as places of meditation, reflection, and worship. History, the film seems to be saying, is something to be teased out and approached somewhat circumspectly rather than something to be delivered to the viewer directly. The names and statements engraved on the stone are only part of the story.

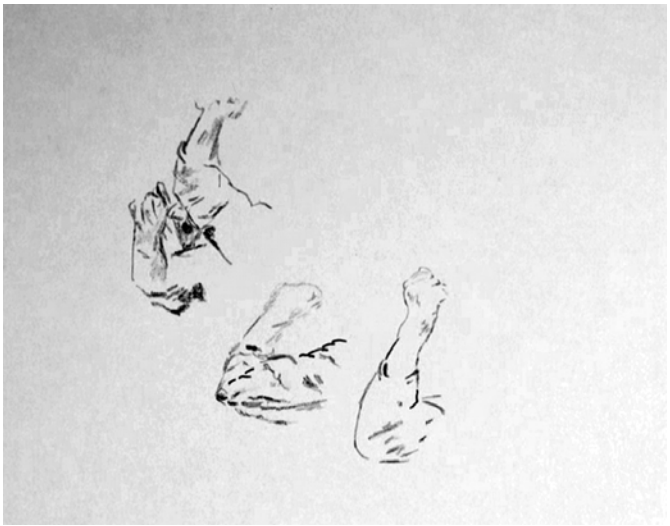
The film's principal artistic inspiration seems to be the landscape films of Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet, in which natural settings, past political struggles, and the wind play similarly prominent roles. In fact, one might say that the wind gets far more play in this film than death does—or the profit motive, for that matter. Gianvito's various ways of approaching the graves, memorials, and shrines through the surrounding landscapes that nestle and sometimes hide these largely unremarked sites is every bit as important as their inscriptions. Like the Straub–Huillet landscape films—which include, among many others, *Fortini/Cani* (1976), *Too Early, Too Late* (1982), *The Death of Empedocles* (1987), *Cézanne* (1989), and *Workers, Peasants* (2001)—*Profit Motive* may sound minimalist but in fact is very far from being so, in part because the leisurely meditative mode both allows and invites the viewer to become far more attentive to details and nuances than one can be in most narrative films.

Where Gianvito deviates most crucially from Straub–Huillet's example is in his desire to explain on screen whom these people and what these struggles were, almost always through allowing us to read the inscriptions; one might even say that the central role played in Straub–Huillet films by recited texts, usually on screen, is performed here by these inscriptions, and Gianvito carefully provides us with all the time we need to read them. (By contrast, the repeated pan of Straub–Huillet's *Europa 2005 – 27 octobre*, a 2006 video without text or title of any kind, appears to presume that the date is all that's needed for viewers to identify the French location and what happened there—a position that I believe can be criticized as provincial rather than elitist.)

To make another comparison, the grave-site markers in *Profit Motive* are filmed with the same contemplative attentiveness that James Benning shows towards the trains rushing through his *RR* (2007), and their cumulative impact has a comparable expansive effect. Yet the historical sensibility Gianvito exercised on his settings registers quite differently from Benning's. Benning seems to regard the industrial waste associated with trains both nostalgically and apocalyptically, seesawing dialectically between these extremes as he invites us to perceive the trains both in relation and in opposition to the various landscapes they pass through. Gianvito's more lyrical sense of setting is much closer to the transcendentalism of a Thoreau or a Terrence Malick, imparting an almost preternatural sense of primeval (and at times even timeless) calm—a mystical communion with deserted landscapes that calls to mind the fact that Gianvito recently edited a collection of interviews with Andrei Tarkovsky.[5] Unlike *RR*, which



In 1869, Uriah Smith Stephens (1821 - 1882) co-founded The Knights of Labor, the first national labor union in the United States and served as its first leader. He was buried in the Odd Fellows' Cemetery in Philadelphia but in 1951 was re-interred along with 65,000 others in nearby Mount Peace cemetery. His remains reside beneath the following wholly unmarked plot.



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suggests at times the kind of epic exhaustiveness being aimed for in John Dos Passos's *U.S.A.*, *Profit Motive* wants to widen our horizons without pretending to stretch them to the limits, repeatedly making us realize that there are many other unrecounted stories of struggle waiting to be told. Its sense of modesty is enhanced and replicated in most of the sites that it visits.

⁂

One of the more useful premises of Zinn's engaging, 729-page book, established in its first chapter, is "that we must not accept the memory of states as our own . . . Nations are not communities and never have been. The history of any country, presented as the history of a family, conceals fierce conflicts of interest (sometimes exploding, most often repressed) between conquerors and conquered, masters and slaves, capitalists and workers, dominators and dominated in race and sex."[6]

Profit Motive can be said to benefit from the same overall vision, even if it's necessarily restricted in most cases to the particular understandings displayed in the site inscriptions (so that, for instance, we learn about why Anne Hutchinson was banished from Massachusetts, but not about why she and her family were slain by Native Americans). And I hasten to add that the film is also somewhat limited by the kind of slant that Zinn readily owns up to, a couple of pages earlier, when he insists that his "argument cannot be against selection, simplification, emphasis, which are inevitable for both cartographers and historians," but goes on to insist that the distortions of mapmakers are necessary for everyone who needs maps. Moreover, the "historian's distortion is more than technical, it is ideological; it is released into a world of contending interests, where any chosen emphasis supports (whether the historian means to or not) some kind of interest, whether economic or political or racial or national or sexual."[7]

A good example of what Zinn means by this can be seen in his brief treatment of Mrs. Rosa Parks (1913–2005), the seamstress whom he rightly credits with launching the Civil Rights movement in late 1955 when she refused to relinquish her seat near the front of a bus in Montgomery, Alabama, was arrested for her defiance of the Jim Crow laws in doing so, and sparked the Montgomery bus boycott. Zinn typically follows the lead of Martin Luther King in giving Parks full credit as an activist but none as a strategist, overlooking the fact that earlier in 1955 she'd attended a workshop on nonviolent, pro-integration tactics at the Highlander Folk School in Monteagle, Tennessee, some of whose workshops King also attended. Eliding this part of Parks's contribution could be interpreted both as a shrewd tactical move (to make her rebellion appear more spontaneous than it actually was) and as a sexist omission that was all too characteristic of 1960s male leftists, including King himself, who may have wanted to figure in the public eye as the only prominent tactician of the Movement. Either way, Zinn's treatment of Parks perfectly illustrates his own point.

I should stress that Parks's grave site, in Detroit, is *not* one of those filmed by Gianvito, though it theoretically could have been. Its epitaph reads, apparently by her own choice, "Rosa L. Parks, wife". This further suggests that the implication of Gianvito's handling of history—that an important part of it can be (and is) written on headstones—is limited in much the same way as Zinn's is. Yet this is a limitation that comes naturally and inevitably with a desire to expand our historical parameters in the choice of people to be examined, as Zinn is also interested in doing.

In one of the rare instances in which he doesn't depend exclusively on a grave or memorial inscription for identification, Gianvito devotes a lengthy intertitle to explain who Uriah Smith Stephens (1821–1882) was—the cofounder and first leader of the first national labor union in the U.S., the Knights of Labor. With the demeanor of a patient schoolteacher (echoing his cameo in *The Mad Songs*), he's interested in sharing discoveries with us, materially as well didactically, drawing upon whatever materials he needs, and he accompanies his fact-finding and soul-searching journeys with a sense of poetry and a kind of passion that are found in the finest instructors.

1. Thom Andersen, "Red Hollywood," in "*Un-American*" *Hollywood*, ed. Frank Krutnik, Steve Neale, Brian Neve, and Peter Stanfield (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press), 2007, 234.
2. www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/02/20/gulf_war.html.
3. From a Director's Statement dated February 2001 and included with the DVD of the film released by Extreme Low Frequency.
4. www.thefanzine.com/articles/film/242/interview_with_director_john_gianvito/3
5. *Andrei Tarkovsky: Interviews*, ed. John Gianvito (Jackson: University Presses of Mississippi, 2006).
6. Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States*, rev. edn (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 10.
7. Ibid., 8.

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ABSTRACT A comparative essay on two feature-length, hybrid films directed by John Gianvito, *The Mad Songs of Fernanda Hussein* (2001), which concerns the irreparable effects of the 1991 Gulf War, and *Profit Motive and the Whispering Wind* (2007), a meditation on the grave sites of American activists.

KEYWORDS John Gianvito, Howard Zinn, *Profit Motive and the Whispering Wind*, *The Mad Songs of Fernanda Hussein*, activist cinema

CREDITS *Profit Motive and the Whispering Wind*. Director, editor: John Gianvito. ©2007 Traveling Light. (Note: a remastered DVD is due in spring 2009 from Watchmaker Films, www.watchmakerfilms.com.)

DVD DATA *The Mad Songs of Fernanda Hussein*. Director: John Gianvito. © 2001 A Traveling Light Production. Publisher: E.L.F., 2005. 1 disc.

LEBANESE CINEMA

DAVID LIVINGSTON EXPLORES HOW RELIGIOUS AND SECTARIAN IDENTITIES ARE EXPRESSED IN GENRE FILMS FROM LEBANON

It wasn't for long, and it was long ago, but for a handful of years the little Middle Eastern country of Lebanon, located on the long, almost flat curve of the eastern Mediterranean, was on track to replace Egypt as the heart of Arab filmmaking. Egypt was the most populous country in the Arab world, and for three decades beginning in the 1930s it was the giant of filmmaking in the vast region stretching from the Pillars of Hercules in the west to the Garden of Eden on the banks of the Euphrates in the east—not because its competitors were Lilliputians, but because there was no competition. But in 1963 a self-inflicted wound delivered by Abdel Nasser in the form of nationalization undermined the mature yet thriving film industry: directors, technicians, actors, and, the lifeblood, financing, headed north, leaving Cairo to the port city of Alexandria and from there by boat to Beirut—a city on the sea where laissez-faire capitalism was the sterling opposite of the Arab socialism preached and practiced by Nasser and other Arab states that had gone, revoltingly, from monarchies to military rule.

From the mid-1920s when Egypt began—tentatively—making Bedouin films, through the 30s with sound propelling the popular song-and-dance genre into the golden era through the 40s and 50s, Egypt was sole member of the Arab filmmaking club. In 1919, just as other countries in the Middle East, especially the Levant, were coming under colonial rule, Egypt rebelled against the British and had achieved substantial autonomy—including artistic autonomy. The rest of the Middle East was either under French and British mandates, and stifled there, or too underdeveloped to sustain filmmaking. It wasn't until the late 50s that Egypt had to deal with the reality of competition, no matter how thin. That first whiff of resistance came from Lebanon.

The Egyptian film industry responded immediately. Boycott, or, more precisely, threats of boycott, kept the Lebanese competition weak and unsure of the future. In the early 1950s when the father of Lebanese cinema, Georges Kaï, sought to exhibit his first film, *Remorse*, all the first-run theaters in downtown Beirut balked—they told Kaï that if they showed a non-Egyptian Arabic film their supply of Egyptian films would dry up. Kaï went from movie house to movie house, asking for a time slot, but with no luck. Kaï had a history in theater; he had gathered a band of around thirty young men from the suburb of Beirut he lived in to form a theatrical group. Some could sing, others could act or play instruments, and after stage success the group thought the next step should be film. That resulted in *Remorse*, a purple melodrama involving crime, greed for gold, love and the death by accident of the bad guys. It was perfect for melodramatic tastes—but there were no takers. Finally, Kaï did what almost all Lebanese must do when in a jam: he called on his party's boss.

Kaï was a member of the Phalange, a political party that had begun under the French as a youth club but was in reality a political party promoting Catholic Maronite interests in Lebanon. Its leader was Pierre Gemayel, whose two sons would become presidents of Lebanon during the 1975–90 civil war. Gemayel himself would lead the Christians into that civil war. Kaï, a member in good standing, had named his two boys after Gemayel's sons and, as is the case in Lebanon, bosses provide favors to loyalists.

"I went to Pierre Gemayel's pharmacy in the Burj [downtown] and told him I had made a film and that I was not able to get any theaters to show it," said Kaï, now in his eighties. "Pierre Gemayel called the owner of the Metropole theater, had him come to his pharmacy, and he told him, 'This isn't right. Georges made a Lebanese film and no theaters are showing it. We should promote Lebanese film.' And that is how I got *Remorse* exhibited in 1955, to great success. It took me two years to get it shown."

George Nasser, too, had to deal with the jealous Egyptians, and he had to struggle to exhibit his film *To Where?* (1957) in downtown Beirut. The film came to prominence at the

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The Rivoli theater, downtown Beirut, pre-1975. Action star Fouad Charaf El Dine .

Photos in this article were obtained through the courtesy of Zafer Henri Azar, Lebanese National Film Cnter.

Cannes Film Festival and was promoted by the French film critic Georges Sadoul, who hailed the film as a starting point for Lebanese national cinema. Despite the positive reviews in France, Nasser faced resistance in Lebanon. "The owners of the first-run theaters were told by Egyptian distributors that they would be punished if they showed the film. They did not want any competition," said the director. "It took two years to show it at a second-run theater." He also tried to exhibit it in Tripoli, Lebanon's second city, at the Colorado theater. That, too, didn't work out. "A rumor was spread that it was a Christian film and people were told not to watch it."

The Lebanese directors of the 1950s produced very few films, and they faced immense—and sometimes absurd—obstacles. Acting, for one, was regarded as a suspect profession, whether in conservative Muslim Egypt, or in equally conservative Lebanon, which was at the time roughly half Muslim and half Christian. "I was told about a girl who might be good for a film I was about to make," said Kaï. "She lived in the Burj and I arranged to go down with others in the film to see her. I don't remember if the family was Muslim or Christian, quite honestly, but the girl's father invited us in, and took us to a door that was closed. She was in the room. He told us to look at her through the keyhole and decide." It was, said the father, all or nothing—there would be no inspecting the merchandise.

The infrastructure, too, was not film-friendly. When Kaï was filming *Memories* (1958), his third film, the electricity company agreed to supply the studio with extra power. When they flicked the switch, they received enough electricity to light a scene, but the rest of the neighborhood went dark. Nasser also had a rough time of it. He filmed *To Where?* over a period of eleven months on Sundays and vacations to accommodate the child actors who had school and the adult actors who had day jobs. Because of problems with the viewer of his Bell + Howell camera, he had to wait a year for the new season to reshoot the opening harvest scene, a crucial scene that set the feel of the film. Sound also bedeviled Nasser. The dubbing machine in France had a different speed than the machine Nasser had initially used, so he had to cut dialogue up, word-by-word, to ensure synchronization.

Michel Haroun was another pioneer who faced problems of his own. His trade was repairing car electrical systems, but with World War II there were no imports from Europe, so he built and sold car batteries for a good sum. Like Kaï, he got his start in theater, and while the film houses were under curfew during the British occupation of Lebanon, special passes could be gotten for the theater. He, too, was fascinated by film, but he was an early pioneer and had to create his own studio before he could begin. He sold his wife's twisted gold bracelets, bought a Debrie camera from the French in 1945, and proceeded to slowly build a film-processing studio. He built half-a-dozen waist-high tanks out of concrete for the chemical bath needed for the film, but film quality would degrade after around ten rolls because of the reaction of the chemicals with the sand and cement. It took a year of experimenting to resolve the problem. With the challenge of the negative solved, he then built a printing machine for a positive copy. To create spotlights, he cut corrugated pipes, welded them to a tripod base, and then welded to the top 5000-watt lights. He lacked the equipment to simultaneously shoot and to match to sound, so dubbing was done in the studio on an editing machine the size of a small television. Every technical aspect of film production had to be addressed by Haroun before he made, in 1957, *Red Flowers*.

This power-sharing, known as the National Pact, is unique in the world, and because the religions are so hostile to one another, Lebanon has long lingered in turmoil, a country but not a nation.

An artisanal spirit existed, not just because these were the early days of Lebanese film, but because the means were limited. The actors, when they were not on screen, served as the film crew. The film was ultimately a product of Haroun's workshop, and the studio was the result of his desire to make films. So it went for a half a decade.

In 1963, with the Egyptian invasion, there was a sea change. From one or two films a year in the late 1950s and early 60s, nine films were made in Lebanon in 1963; eleven in 1964; sixteen in 1965 and twenty-five in 1966. In Egypt, the numbers were reversed, and only a dozen films separated the giant from its tiny Arab competitor. Most studios were nationalized, the emphasis had shifted from creating films to suit stars and cater to popular tastes, to creating what became known as "films with a purpose"—or, more precisely, propaganda films. Egypt had a population of 27.3 million in 1962, and trailed only Hollywood and India in film production, but it was on course to be supplanted by Lebanon, population 1.7 million. Egypt, with 1000 films behind it, was in danger of being surpassed in yearly production by a country that had less than a decade of filmmaking history and less than a dozen films.

There were other numbers that were important. While Egyptian films were popular in Lebanon and the Arab world, it was Hollywood and western films—Italy, France, the U.K.—that played at Lebanese theaters around eighty percent of the time. Egyptian films represented around fifteen percent of viewership, and there were a substantial number of Soviet films as well as the odd Indian one playing. In 1962, for instance, a year before the invasion, there were 586 films imported into Lebanon: 327 were American; fifty-seven Italian; forty-nine British; thirty-six Soviet; thirty-one French; seven Indian; and seventy-seven Egyptian.

Lebanon was a small market yet hugely important for Egypt. In 1964, yearly Lebanese film attendance was 37.2 million—with individual attendance at 22.5 films, the second highest in the world, and only slightly behind Hong Kong. Attendance in Egypt was seventy million, with individual attendance at three. Tickets were cheaper in Egypt because of the lower standard of living, so Egyptian films shown in Lebanon were crucial to the Egyptian film industry and the Egyptian economy. Hard currency was needed in the socialist country, and Egypt could not afford to have any Arab country compete with its total dominance of Arab filmmaking.

But, in 1963, Lebanon became the new hope of the expatriate Egyptian film colony, and the Egyptians were in a bind: they could not simultaneously crush opposition in Lebanon while boosting film production there. It would be rude.

What changed in Lebanon was not just the number of films being shot, but the genres used. And with genre change, the religious faultline of Lebanon was exposed. The early films of the 1950s—directed by Kaï, Nasser, and Haroun—were melodramas that took place in the mountains of Lebanon, the ancestral home of the Maronites. The Maronites, Catholics of the east and a product of the Christological Controversies of early Christianity, saw Lebanon as theirs. It was created by the French, with strong lobbying by the Maronite Patriarch, to serve as a homeland for Christians in the Muslim Middle East. Or, at least, that was the way the Maronites saw Lebanon. That the Muslims who happened to live in the areas the French attached to Mount Lebanon were un-

willing to become Lebanese mattered little. France was a world power, and the Muslims could do little but grumble—at least until the civil war of 1975.

Lebanon became a nation in 1943, when the French were fatally weakened by the German occupation, and leaders of these two antagonistic religions snuck in the back door, creating a country independent of France with the help of the British army then stationed in Lebanon. Their newly independent country was based on sect and the parceling out of power would be done on a sectarian basis. This power-sharing, known as the National Pact, is unique in the world, and because the religions are so hostile to one another, Lebanon has long lingered in turmoil, a country but not a nation.

The genre shift with the advent of the Egyptians articulated the Muslim aspect of Lebanon, replacing the Maronite filmmakers and their Christian vision.

The most noticeable shift was away from the mountains to either the city, or to the Bedouin tribes—something Lebanon didn't have. The Bedouins were nomads, part of early Arab folklore, wanderers of the desert. Lebanon, however, was an exceptionally green country, and it had no desert. The quintessential Egyptian Bedouin film displays the nobility of the Arabs who did not settle in cities, who kept to traditional ways of camel grazing and razzias (raids) against caravans and rival tribes. It was an honor/shame culture in which insults would be quickly addressed. A knightly code of chivalry prevailed. The nobility of a family rested on the bravery of its sons and the chasteness of its daughters.

The premier director of Bedouin films was Niazi Mustapha, Egypt's most prolific director, who also made films in other genres in addition to his Bedouin works. Part of the Egyptian invasion, he made *A Bedouin Girl in Love* in Lebanon in 1963. This reinvigorated the Bedouin genre. In Egypt, the genre had grown stale after the 1952 revolution that brought Nasser to power, and a wave of realism swept filmmaking. Directors were not filming past heroic glories but present social problems. It was in Lebanon that the Bedouin genre was revitalized. It was not surprising that the Bedouin genre, or the song-and-dance genre, would be popular among Lebanese directors. Lebanese censors were keen to prevent filmmakers from focusing on the country's many problems. The government, or so the Lebanese film critic Walid Chmeit claimed in the early 1970s, was hostile to subversive expressions, including the depiction of confessionalism, feudalism, tribalism, exploitation, monopolies, or repression. Since these did not exist for the state, they should not exist in Lebanese cinema.

There was a subgenre of the Bedouin genre, one that took a Bedouin out of the desert, away from his familiar surroundings, and cast him or her in a new role. Into this Egyptian subgenre plunged Mohammed Selmane, who would become Lebanon's most prolific director. His Bedouin girls go to Paris, or to London, or venture into the city. There is a love story, for that was a requirement of all films, and there was comedy, for that too was part and parcel of Egyptian filmmaking. And there was plenty of song and dance. All these ingredients, inherited from the Egyptians, were part of Selmane's repertoire, whether his Bedouin films or his comedy/romances, and it proved to be a hit among Lebanese moviegoers.

That Selmane would make Bedouin films or other Egyptian genre films that always included song and dance, romance, and comedy is not surprising. He had begun his career as a *qira'a*, a reciter of the Koran, and his voice was such that he was taken to Egypt in the mid-1940s, sang there, acted in over a dozen films, and returned to Lebanon after, according to legend, being booted out by King Farouk who disliked sharing a mistress with him. Selmane brought to Lebanese films, on the heels of the Egyptian invasion, an Egyptianness that undermined the mountain films of the Maronites.

Most importantly, his films featured not the Lebanese dialect of Arabic, but the Egyptian dialect. The difference is not slight. All educated Arabs know classical Arabic, though it is only spoken on special occasions, such as in political speeches, or used on the nightly news. It is the spoken dialect, however, that immediately labels one a Lebanese, or a Palestinian, or an Egyptian, or a Saudi. It is not simply the difference in accent between an American Southerner or a Boston Brahmin. While it expresses geography, it also expresses nationality, and is therefore more profound.

Selmane's first film was in that watershed year of 1957 in which Nasser, Kaï, and Haroun also made films—albeit films set in the Maronite mountains. Called *The First Melody*, it was in the Lebanese dialect—even more specifically, in the Shiite accent of southern Lebanon. It is an accent that not only expressed geography, but sect. His second film, *Appointment with Hope* (1958), a rough remake of *How to Marry a Millionaire* (1953), featured three male leads—a Syrian, an Egyptian, and Selmane himself. All spoke their own dialect of Arabic. The three female leads spoke Lebanese Arabic and the action occurred in Beirut. Whatever dialect of Arabic used, the films of Selmane, more than those of any other director, resonated with the Lebanese public, particularly among fellow Shiites. His fish-out-of-water themes, specially

Clockwise from top left: Lebanon's first film, *The Adventures of Elias Mabrouk* (1929). Heartthrob Ihsan Sadek in Georges Kaï's *Two Hearts and One Body* (1957). Two brothers in *To Where?* (George Nasser, 1957). Kaï's *Memories* (1958). Director Mohammed Selmane (center) on the set of *Appointment with Hope* (1958). *Red Flowers* (Michel Haroun, 1957).

in his Bedouin films which usually featured the songbird Samira Tawfik, mirrored the dislocation the Shiites were going through beginning in the 1950s due to modernization and mechanization: hundreds of thousands left their villages and farms—and their traditional familiar ways of life—to eke a living in Beirut as unskilled workers.

By the 1960s, Selmane's financiers made him switch to Egyptian Arabic—better for export to the Arab world which knew the Egyptian dialect through film and radio—and the battle lines between what was considered a Lebanese film and what was considered just a film made in Lebanon had been drawn. True Lebanese films—such as those by the Maronite directors—were films in Lebanese Arabic and they represented the nation. Those films made in Lebanon with Egyptian actors and the Egyptian dialect were something else—bastardized, inauthentic, mere mimicry of a foreign culture.

While the sun-and-fun films continued to be made, as well as Bedouin films, and spy/police films, the new mood gave birth to a new genre, that of the* fedayeen, *the freedom fighters.

As film criticism developed in the 1960s in Lebanon, at cine-clubs and film magazines, critics clearly demarcated one from the other. Selmane became the exemplar of inauthentic cinema. It did not help that Selmane was a horrible technician, and that strange shadows, or even the arm of a stagehand, would appear in his films. In *The Black Jaguar* (1965), made almost a decade after Selmane began directing, the cameraman's shadow is reflected on the sand—and very laughingly visible—during a fight scene. Selmane seemed to be ignorant of montage, and his camera would, in imitation of the early years of film, remain stationary as the characters acted out their parts as if on a stage. Close-ups, too, were a nuisance, and since it was song-and-dance, they could come anywhere in the film, sometimes back-to-back.

Yet Selmane prospered, and served as the epigone for a generation of directors who made song-and-dance, sun-and-fun, love-and-romance films as well as Bedouin films—all in imitation, poorly at that, of the Egyptian models.

Simultaneous with the Egyptian invasion and the shift in genres, James Bond exploded into the world, and a slew of Italian knock-offs hit Lebanon. This spy genre, coupled almost immediately to the police genre, became the third of the four genres to influence Lebanese films in the 1960s. Lebanon had become an ideal staging ground for western directors wanting to add the exotic to their spy capers. The most famous spy of them all, Kim Philby, had set sail for the Soviet Union in 1963 from the port of Beirut, with MI5 and MI6 hard on his heels, and the image of Beirut as a spy's nest took hold. There were so many western films that featured Beirut as a spy haven that the government protested, claiming that their country was being besmirched as a home for international gangs and spies, and in 1966 insisted that all foreign film scripts be vetted for approval before shooting could begin.

Lebanese directors made their own spy films. Selmane and his followers liberally borrowed the James Bond theme music, and their stars, again to the consternation of critics and those who wanted legitimate Lebanese film, spoke in Egyptian Arabic.

By now, the early Maronite directors had pretty much given up. Haroun felt he had been cheated by his partners, so used his studio, along with the help of his sons, to develop other peoples' films. Kaï made films throughout the 1950s and into the early 60s. His final film, however, done in conjunction with Mohammed Selmane in 1963, *O, Love*, was in Egyptian Arabic and was a song-and-dance comedy/romance—a clear sign that the Egyptian invasion had won out. He returned to theater. George Nasser—seen by Sadoul as the true originator of Lebanese film—made a second film in 1961 and a third in 1974, but he concentrated on making advertisements for television, or state-sponsored documentaries extolling Lebanon—whether it was water skiing, traditional handicrafts, or the army. He, too, gave up.

There was still a hunger in Lebanon in the 1960s for something other than the Egyptian genres, or the western spy/police genre in which the actors spoke Egyptian. One notable film that was both in and out of genre was the noir *Garo* (1965), directed by Gary Garabidian, a Lebanese Armenian. He shot, directed, edited, produced, and wrote the screenplay to *Garo*, the story of an Armenian bandit. It was made on a pittance. Garabidian worked at a Lebanese television station, and financed the film from paycheck to paycheck. Selmane, known for taking long shots, would often not use the end of a reel for fear of running out of film, so cinematographer friends would pass them over at a discount to Garabidian—extra bits of East German Agfa and Orwo. It took eight months to shoot *Garo*. The actor who played Garo was Mounir Maasri, freshly back from the Actors Studio. Maasri, years before, thought the Greek-Turkish director Elia Kazan, who had a very Lebanese-sounding name, was Lebanese, and wrote to him, seeking a mentor—one Lebanese

Clockwise from top left: singer Samira Tawfik in *Bedouin Girl in Rome* (1965). Mounir Maasri as the gangster Garo, 1965. *We Are All Fedayeen* (1969). Civil war damage to the projection room, Ministry of Information, 1975. *Woman of the Black Moons* (Samir Khoury, 1971). Tawfik and Syrian singer Fahd Ballan in *The Conquerors* (Farouk Ajrama, 1966).

to another. While Kazan's response was not encouraging, Maasri went to New York anyway and eventually to the Actors Studio.

Another film hailed by critics as legitimate Lebanese film, one dealing with the nation and its Lebanese character, was *Safar Barlak* (1967). It's a star-studded film. No film before or after has approached *Safar Barlak* in the number of Lebanese stars it boasts—from song, radio, film, and television. The tale is hailed as national cinema, not only because it is in Lebanese Arabic, but because it looks at that period in which the mountaineers of Lebanon join in revolt against the Ottoman Turks who had ruled the area for 400 years.

Safar Barlak set attendance records, opening in late October after curfews had ended following the 1967 war and the incomprehensible defeat the Arabs suffered in under a week at the hands of the Jewish state of Israel. A new mood set in. While the sun-and-fun films continued to be made, as well as Bedouin films, and spy/police films, the new mood gave birth to a new genre, that of the *fedayeen*, the freedom fighters. Because the Arab frontline states of Jordan, Egypt, and Syria proved to be such paper tigers, the Palestinians took it upon themselves to liberate their land through guerrilla attacks. Film reflected this, and 1969 marked the efflorescence of *fedayeen* films.

The films of that year, made by Lebanese directors, were about freedom fighters battling the Israelis and winning. They were about heroics and nobility, unity of the people and the treachery of the Zionists. In Christian Ghazi's *The Fedayeen*, the resistance heroes were supermen; in Rida Myassar's *The Palestinian in Revolt*, a Sephardic Jewess takes up with a Palestinian Muslim and in one scene they take shelter in a convent, thereby uniting all three monotheistic religions against the evil colonial western Zionists. In Gary Garabidian's *We Are All Fedayeen*, Zionist soldiers lustfully paw at a young Palestinian girl who is walking home with a jug of water on her head. It is clear who is evil, and whose land is being usurped.

This genre came and went in an eye blink. Lebanese Christians may have paid lip service to the rights of the 200,000 Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, but the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) was armed, and factions set up checkpoints in the city and mountain roads passing their camps, stopping Lebanese, searching their cars, and undermining the government. Attacks on Israel from southern Lebanon invited retaliation, what political scientist Walid Khalidi called "super retaliation." The *fedayeen* genre could not, as Lebanon moved toward civil war, last.

There was a general exhaustion by 1975. Nasser had died in 1970. Sadat had replaced him and the nationalization of the film industry ended. Actors and directors decamped to Cairo. That was the first blow. The second was the war. It lasted fifteen years and there were actually two collapses of filmmaking, the first in 1975. By the early 1980s a mini-renaissance took hold. The Israeli invasion of 1982 resulted in the evacuation of the PLO from Beirut, and the reunification of Beirut under the control of the government. There were international troops—American, French, British, and Italians—as well as Israelis, who were aligned with the Phalangist Party. It seemed as if the war was over for good. On this false belief, financiers invested in film.

Gone was the Egyptian dialect. Gone, too, was the Bedouin film as well as the innocent love stories that featured song and dance. The spy genre, now purely a police genre, survived. Samir Ghoussayni and his disciple Youssef Charaf El Dine each made around a dozen films involving the forces of order fighting against disorder.

The Lebanese actor Fouad Charaf El Dine, Youssef's brother, became the country's first action hero. He battled, usually as Captain Fouad, malefactors, usually drug smugglers, and in the end the Lebanese army or security forces would join the captain in shootouts. "We had the idea of *Dirty Harry*. We wanted a cop who drank, had woman, but who also protected the law," said the actor. Charaf El Dine had an athletic physique and windblown features that spoke of hard-living masculinity. The brothers brought the Lebanese version of the action film to the screen. They could afford to blow up one car a film. These films, as the film critic Mohammed Soueid observed, were a reaffirmation of the National Pact between the Muslims and Christians. It was the government, or agents of the government, that imposed order on chaos.

But it also could not last. By the mid-1980s in West Beirut the religious Shiites were fighting the secular Shiites, the Druze were fighting the Shiites, the Shiites and Druze were fighting the Sunnis, the Shiites were fighting the (Sunni) Palestinians. By the end of the decade, in East Beirut, the mountain Maronites were fighting the city Maronites. There were wars within wars. The norm from 1986 to the end of the war was one film a year. There were no films in 1990.

Despite the number of films made by Ghoussayni and Charaf El Dine during the mini-renaissance, they usually ignored the war. Both learned filmmaking while apprenticed during the Egyptian invasion, and perhaps this was the reason they shied away from the war—it was too controversial. Or, alternatively, there could be no ribbon-and-bow happy ending if they described the reality of the Lebanese religious war.

One film that stood out in this period was Youssef Charaf El Dine's *The Vision* (1985). It was a remake of Mel Gibson's *Mad Max 2: The Road Warrior* (1981), with downtown Beirut, already in ruins, as the cityscape of the future. The film took place in the year 2000, after the world was wasted by plague and disorder. The film was a clever vehicle to present metaphor and symbol, to speak of the present, and did not, like many other Lebanese films, succumb to easy and obvious reconciliation of the Muslims and Christians. It did not present the halves of the country as the country saw itself, but rather pitted the forces of chaos against that of order. Armed with a crossbow, the flinty Fouad Charaf El Dine is a nomadic loner who comes upon a society in trouble. The world has lost the epoxy of civilization, but this small society clings to pre-apocalypse ways. The beasts in the form of gangs with guns—not much different than militiamen—are pounding at the door, and the outcome will determine the fate of this particular civilization. The elderly leader of the mini-society, destined to be thrown to his death from a roof into the rubble, catalogues the collapse of civilization and of Lebanon: "Baalbak, Beirut, Baabda, Sidon, Tyre, Byblos, Tripoli, the Cedars—all have been forgotten. Only dozens of people live there now."

The films of the post-civil war period, like those of the war, made it a point to balance the nation: for one church steeple, a minaret . . . for one East Beirut sniper, a West Beirut sniper.

After much action and confrontation, that small society (at least the women and children) are able through a secret underground passage to escape the threat of the barbarians outside their gates. Charaf El Dine parts ways with the *Mad Max* sequel in his ending. In *The Vision*, all the men of both sides lie on the ground, dead. There is a final showdown, and it is between the two sides as the Charaf El Dines saw it in all their films: good against evil, order against chaos. The showdown between the hero and the villain leader culminates in a crossbow shootout. It is a Western-style shootout with both men facing each other in the street, man to man, with frequent crosscuts to intensify the tension. True to the tradition of the Western, the bad guy draws first. The loner hero shoots an arrow-sword into the mouth of the leader of the forces of disorder, who twists and dies. In quick flashback we see it was he who had killed the loner's wife. While this returns us to the *Mad Max* saga, the fate of the hero is different from that of Max. He is shot in the heart with an arrow, and he too dies.

Real war films, and not just futuristic fantasies, were also being made, such as Rafik Hajjar's *The Shelter* (1981) and *The Explosion* (1982) and Maroun Baghdadi's *Little Wars* (1982) and Borhane Alaouie's *Beirut Encounter* (1981). These were university-trained directors who had studied in Europe, and the films they made dealt with the breakdown of relationships in a society that was already broken. It was a problem no action hero or army unit could resolve. A shift was occurring—slowly at first, but by the 1990s the dominant genre was that of war film. It wasn't of gun or artillery battles, but of little wars between people being torn apart by the conflict.

Some films sought to depict a resolution to the conflicts. In *The Explosion* the two lovers—one Muslim, one Christian—reconcile on the Green Line, that space dividing Muslim West Beirut from Christian East Beirut. The opposite was more common. In *Beirut Encounter*, the couple, one Muslim, one Christian, never do have their encounter, and the young Christian woman leaves Beirut airport to America for good. In *The Shelter*, a group of Muslims and Christians seek to survive under the constant sound of shelling and whizzing of bullets. It ends with a man and woman killed by sniper bullets, their bodies stretched out on the street in front of the shelter.

A pall of alienation loomed over war films, particularly as war films came to be the principle genre in the 1990s and beyond. Religions were alienated from each other, as were people. In Samir Habchi's 1992 *The Tornado*, the main character, sucked unwillingly into the maelstrom of Lebanon, is driven to near madness. At film's end, he stumbles to a hillside, Lear-like, pistol in hand. He plants his feet into the sod, grips the gun with both hands, and raises it in a long swinging motion to the sky and shoots eleven times. Blood drips to his face. An instant later, there is a thunderclap, sounding like a twelfth gunshot, and rain floods him—perhaps cleansing him. It wasn't only people who were alienated from each other, but from God.

In a scene from another film, Jean-Claude Codsi's *It Is Time* (1993), in a church, a Jesus figure appears at the entrance, bathed in beatific light. He approaches the altar, turns, and drops his robe. He raises an automatic rifle and mows down the parishioners. It is not Jesus the Redeemer, but Jesus the Destroyer. Codsi explains that this, like the Godblood in *The Tornado*, was censored out because it offended religious sensibilities, a crime in Lebanon.

The assault on Christianity—and, in reality, its Maronite form—took a less terrifying shape than that of abandonment by the Creator. In *It Is Time*, in a flashback, a Jesuit priest draws a line on the blackboard representing electrical current. Crudely drawn bulbs attached to the line begin to radi-

ate as he chalks in cartoon lines indicating the glow. Those were the people closest to God he tells his young students—the Catholic Church and its adherents. Fellow Christians—"the Greek Orthodox and Protestants"—were connected to the line, but did not glow. He erases the cartoon lines from the Orthodox and Protestant bulbs. Floundering at the bottom of the board, like belly-up fish, are the atheists, who know no God, he says. In between, close to the current but unconnected, are other bulbs. They are the Jews and Muslims, knowers of the One God but possessors of imperfect knowledge. They neither glow nor are they attached to the electrical current. The line about the Muslims was cut when the film was shown commercially.

Muslim directors, too, saw the problem of Lebanon as one of religion. Many hated religion and were atheists, or just hated religion. In Randa Chahal Sabbag's 1999 black comedy *Civilized People*, mourners at a burial, uneasy as shelling grew closer, quickly scurry away as the coffin is kicked into the grave. In the same film, the director's brother plays a Christian sniper pinning down residents in a West Beirut building. The sniper has been driven mad, or was already so, and has hauled a corpse up to his eleventh-floor perch in an abandoned building, placed him in a dentist's chair, and plays cards with him while entering in dialogue (based, said Sabbag, on a true story she was told). Around him on the blown-out walls are pictures of Jesus. Following the shooting to death of a priest who sought to cross the sniper's territory, the sniper has a long mad conversation with Jesus—getting angrier by the sentence.

In Ziad Doueiri's 1998 *West Beyrouth*, religion is repeatedly blasted in such a sly manner that it can almost go unnoticed. In one of the harshest blows, a boy makes his friend swear to God he will not reveal a secret he is about to tell him. But that isn't enough, and he makes him swear to the Prophet Mohammed. As he is making him swear, we barely notice it, and it can be easily missed, the boy is urinating. State censors called in both a sheikh and a priest to review the film, says the director, a highly unusual move, but they missed all the insults, including the pissing on religion.

Despite this assault, directors continued to cling to the idea upon which Lebanon was based. While it can easily be dismissed as grasping at straws, or as desperately romantic, the directors still presented the National Pact as possible—at least on the individual level. The films of the post-civil war period, like those of the war, made it a point to balance the nation: for one church steeple, a minaret; for one Christian character, a Muslim character; for one East Beirut sniper, a West Beirut sniper. The lovers of the early war films, one Christian, one Muslim, were paralleled in post-war films. In Jean Chamoun's 2000 *In the Shadows of the City*, the two young children involved in puppy love are of different religions. In *West Beyrouth*, a Muslim boy is given a cross by a Christian girl, and he strings it over his neck to join the plaque with the word *Allah* stamped on it. "Now I'll be able to go anywhere in the city," he says. In Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige's 1999 *The Rose House*, two refugee families squatting in a house belong to the two religious communities. In Jocelyn Saab's 1995 *Once Upon a Time, Beirut*, the two young female time travelers who narrate the film belong to the two monotheisms that have bedeviled Lebanon. Saab felt she "had to" subscribe to the convention.

Critics are of the mind that legitimate Lebanese film began in the early 1980s. On the surface, it seems commonsensical. The Egyptian influence was gone, films were in the Lebanese dialect, and almost all films, as the decade progressed, dealt with a Lebanese subject—war. But this intuitive description is wrong. The Maronite vision of Lebanon of the 1950s was clearly an attempt to create a national film. Selmane, too, in the 60s sought to create his own version of national film even while using the Egyptian genres, Egyptian actors, and the Egyptian dialect in attempting to ease the Shiites exodus from villages to city. And even the *fedayeen* genre, films about the Palestinian resistance, was not something ultramontane. The Lebanese lived cheek-to-jowl with the Palestinians, their wretched refugee camps abutting Muslim and Christian Lebanese neighborhoods, and Lebanon was thoroughly implicated in the Palestinian struggle.

These were all different visions of Lebanon told by those who saw the country from different angles. Often, sect was the principal optic through which the country was observed. Today, all the old genres are dead, leaving the country poorer for it. The triumph of the war film over all others and the manner in which directors grapple with the genre probably means that the wounds of war have not yet been healed. But it can also mean that, somewhere subterranean, in the collective subconsciousness, which indeed can be a scary place, this lingering peace from 1990 to the present is really just a parenthesis, a pause in the conflict; the real resolution between Muslim and Christian, between east and west, remains elusive, yet undiscovered.

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KEYWORDS Lebanese film, Lebanese sects, Middle Eastern cinema, Maronite, Shiite

ABSTRACT A survey of the history of cinema in Lebanon from its faltering beginnings in the mid-1950s, through a period of great vitality, to its recent sporadic state. Particular attention is paid to the way in which genre films have dramatized a range of sectarian viewpoints.

BEYOND THE CHOIR: AN INTERVIEW WITH DAVID SIMON

RICHARD BECK TALKS TO THE CREATOR OF *THE WIRE* AND *GENERATION KILL* ABOUT TELEVISION STORYTELLING AND THE IRAQ CONFLICT

David Simon worked as a crime reporter for the *Baltimore Sun* for twelve years—from 1983 to 1995—before deciding to pursue a career in television. After helping to write and produce *Homicide: Life on the Streets* and *The Corner*, Simon received widespread critical acclaim for his work as writer and executive producer of HBO's *The Wire*, which has gained a reputation as a landmark television drama. *Generation Kill*, a seven-part miniseries based on Evan Wright's book of the same name, aired in weekly installments on HBO this summer. Simon is now starting work on a pilot for *Treme*, a proposed multi-season drama about musical culture in post-Katrina New Orleans.

As Simon repeatedly emphasized during our interview, *Generation Kill* aims to adhere strictly to Wright's own account of the Iraq War's first three weeks. Although the seven-hour miniseries necessarily abridges the 370-page book, Simon has largely achieved this goal. Both the book and the miniseries follow the marines of the elite First Reconnaissance Battalion during the first three weeks of the war, and while lines of dialogue have been juggled and reorganized in transition from book to film, the sequence of events is almost identical. First Recon was positioned at the very tip of the American invasion. The miniseries focuses heavily on First Recon's Bravo Company. Sergeant Brad "Iceman" Colbert (Alexander Skarsgård), Corporal Josh Ray Person (James Ransone), and Lance Corporal Harold James Trombley (Billy Lush) occupied the lead Humvee along with "Scribe" Wright (Lee Tergeson). From there the series moves up the chain of command: First Lieutenant Nathaniel Fick (Stark Sands), Captain Craig "Encino Man" Schwetje (Brian Wade), and First Recon's commander, Lieutenant Colonel Stephen "Godfather" Ferrando (Chance Kelly). First Recon's outlandish disciplinarian, Sergeant-Major John Sixta (Neal Jones), further complicates the battalion's political picture. *Generation Kill* is very interested in the military hierarchy, and it can take a while to figure out who is in charge of whom.

The strategy behind the U.S. Army's invasion of Iraq was a novel one. Rather than progress slowly from town to town, rooting out insurgents and establishing security, the marines of First Recon were essentially turned into high-speed battering rams. The breakneck pace gave marines little time to make important decisions, and so lethal mistakes were made. We see Corporal Walt Hasser (Pawel Szajda) accidentally kill a civilian at a roadblock, something which has happened throughout the course of the war. In Hasser's case, it is a one-time error, but some soldiers are seen to be more generally ill-equipped for combat. One unstable platoon commander, Captain Dave McGraw (Eric Nenninger), is sarcastically called "Captain America" behind his back.

The series follows First Recon to Baghdad, where the incompetent prosecution of the American reconstruction effort becomes the main theme. The United States opened up a Pandora's Box when it invaded Iraq; *Generation Kill* shows us how the lid came off.

The interview took place in Simon's office, located in the Federal Hill neighborhood of Baltimore, Maryland. We spoke for an hour and a half, Simon reclining in an armchair. His speech is highly declarative. When he became animated, he would sit up and lean forward in his seat.

Richard Beck: **The war's opening weeks were very thoroughly covered by the news media. What does *Generation Kill* show us that we don't already know?**

David Simon: I'll answer that in two ways. First, the actual dynamic of how this war appeared to the men on the ground is a story that we haven't seen yet. It is entirely new. The sheer weight of the imprecision of war; the repetitive killing of civilians; the disconnects between maneuver warfare as it got complete credit—and rightly so in those first weeks—for toppling the government, and the needs of the armed

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Seated, from left: David Simon, Eric Kocher, Ed Burns

Photo: Paul Schiraldi. Courtesy HBO.

forces to control events after the war. You think you were there because you were watching two minute stand-ups from an embedded reporter or because you've seen some documentary. No. You did not walk in the boots of those marines on an intimate basis. I haven't seen that movie yet. If somebody else has done it, I'd be happy to see it, because I'd be interested. Second answer, which I think is even more fundamental, is that we also know what happened in the French Revolution, but that doesn't make reading *A Tale of Two Cities* a worthless misadventure. Let me just extend my own work. Everybody knows what happened with Hurricane Katrina. They know the struggles of people in New Orleans since the storm. Does that mean that I'm not supposed to tell a story in New Orleans about people in that situation? Are their stories unworthy of being acknowledged as part of the human dynamic? I don't get that. At that point what you're saying is, "Anything we think we know about, we don't need to feel."

In the book, Evan Wright makes much of the idea that American soldiers today are different, in important generational ways, from their predecessors in, say, World War II. You don't. Why not?

I think it's de facto in the miniseries. Does anyone stand up and say, "Hey, we're different from the guys in *Band of Brothers*?" No. But when marines are going into battle rapping Eminem and talking about warfare in the context of a video game, or clearing a village and referencing the show *Cops*, those things are in and of themselves indicative of a generational change. We're more of an urban people. Marines suffer from the same attention deficit disorder as the entire culture. But I think in some ways you can overstate the differences.

One thing that is the same is why they're fighting. And by that I don't mean the geopolitical issues. Why marines fight in Iraq is the same reason that marines fought at Tarawa or Iwo Jima. It's the same reason that soldiers fought in the trenches at Petersburg or Gettysburg or Roman centurions fought on the Rhine. You fought for the guy next to you. You fight for the camaraderie. You are the warrior elite, and it comes down to not embarrassing yourself and asserting for your unit and asserting for the guys who have your back. I think that veterans of other wars will recognize that.

With respect to camerawork, the miniseries avoids the overexposed, realism-on-steroids look that you get in a lot of war movies like *Saving Private Ryan*. Who is responsible for the look?

Well all credit to the directors, Susanna White and Simon Cellan Jones. But also Ivan Strasburg, the director of photography, who I worked with on *The Corner*, and who at that time had done this movie called *The Murder of Stephen Lawrence*, which I thought was just shot so simply and so intimately. One of the things I'm very conscious of is not making the camerawork the story. These are writer-driven projects. That tends to militate against a certain amount of stylization. If we're confident that the material is there on the page, then we just want it to breathe normally. At no point do you want to remind people that it's a movie. If the camerawork reminds them that it's a movie, the camerawork is failing in its job. If the camera conveys story and keeps people in the story, that's pretty much our rule. I'm always more impressed when simplicity works than when shit gets complicated.

These quiet, tragic scenes sometimes follow right on the heels of a thrilling battle scene or one of Ray Person's outrageous comic monologues. Like when he rants that if Iraqis weren't so sexually frustrated—if Sadaam had invested more in the "pussy infrastructure" of Iraq—there wouldn't be any need to go to war.

That actually was a little bit political. There are very smart people who have written about the profound discontent in the Arab street about the status of Arab males. But Person didn't actually say that. He actually gave the NAMBLA speech, about how the war is to open Iraq up for the North American Man-Boy Love Association. And he was very funny. But it was so off the wall and so absurd, and you're just getting to know Person. So we stepped in as filmmakers. That was me saying, "It's too early for NAMBLA." When the real Person read that stuff he said, "This is funny as shit! I wish I'd said this stuff. This sounds like me." But he didn't. All that stuff about pussy infrastructure, that was me. The important point was that Person was rambling in some psychotic, Ripped Fuel-induced way about why we were going to war. We kept the tonalities of how that car felt. And I can live with that much manipulation. What I can't live with is when Person turns into John Wayne or Montgomery Clift when he's not ranting as he goes over the border, or when he's not behaving as he actually behaved. I'm trying to transmit the book. Once you decide to use real names—once you say, "Let's really depict Ray Person, let's really depict Brad Colbert"—the book becomes the bible, and you really have to become fundamentalist about it. Maybe not perfectly fundamentalist because, again, I just told you a place where we had to cheat. But fundamentalist in the sense of, "I must convey the meaning that they intended." So if it gets political, it's because it got political for the marines. By the time they got to Baghdad, Lt. Fick at least is wrestling with what it means: "Oh, we did all this and there's no plan?" But Fick has to feel it. It can't be David Simon channeling David Simon through Fick. That's not fair.

But if you're just transmitting the contents of Wright's book, why bother to make the miniseries?

Film has its own power. Film is powerful because you live and breathe the moment with all your senses. The only thing you don't do is taste film. That's about it. And HBO gave us the hours to actually tell the story as it's told in the book. Why wouldn't you want to transmit journalism, and make it a statement about what actually is and was? Why is that somehow insufficient to the task? One of the things that happens to journalism in Hollywood is that Hollywood presumes to make it better by fictionalizing certain aspects: "We had to dramatize certain things." "We had to make it better than life." "Life is anti-drama. We had to make it drama." Now there's no denying that sometimes that's true, but there's also no denying that sometimes what they did was destroy something that was very true to begin with. If it had merely been competently conveyed it would have been an accomplishment. And yet they screwed around and turned it into bullshit.

Still, isn't journalism already a statement about "what actually is and was"?

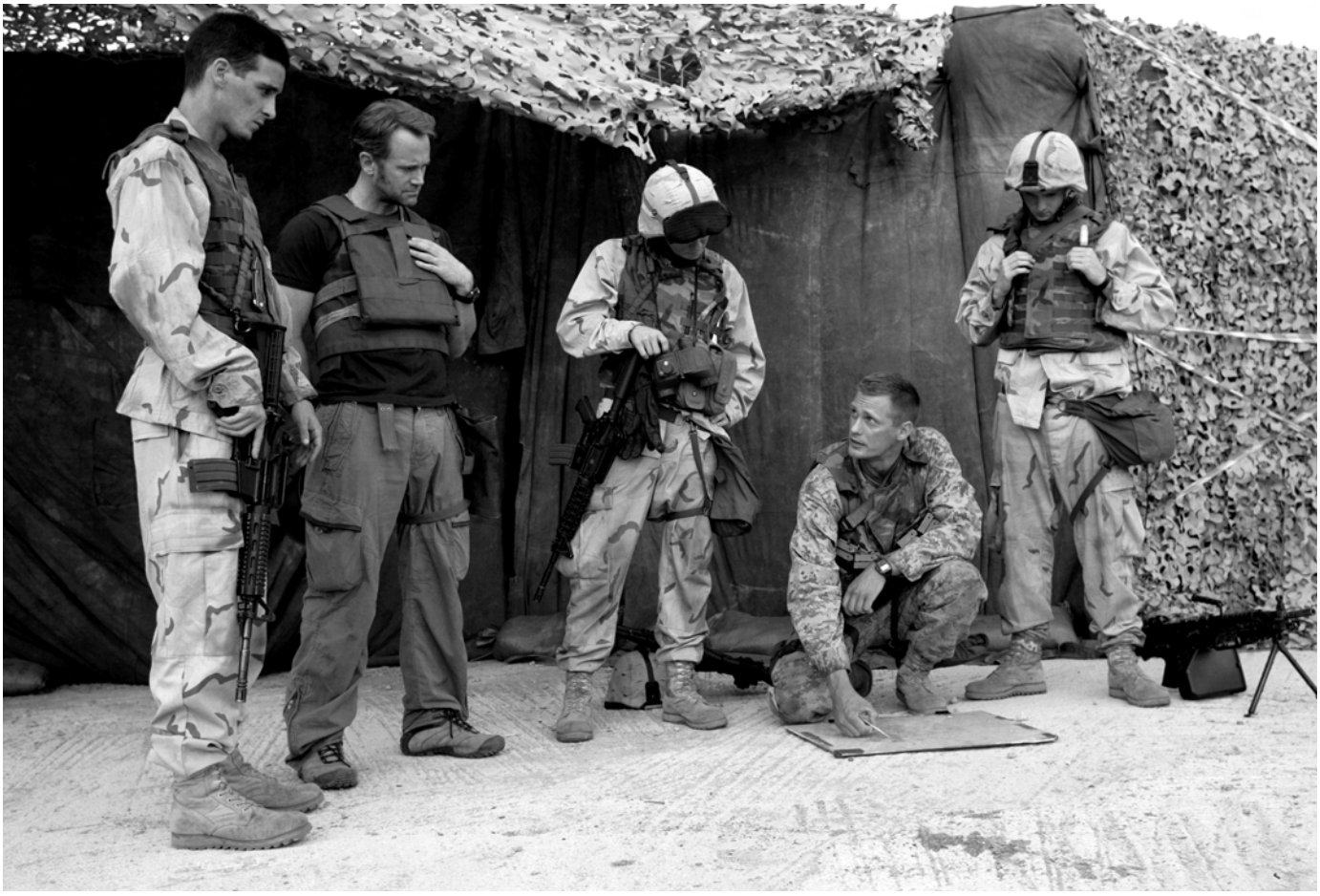
But you know how many people are going to read that book? Several hundred thousand read that book, and that's because it's now a bestseller. Most books: twenty, thirty thousand readers if you're lucky. How many people are going to watch *Generation Kill*? In the end, with all the DVDs and foreign sales, check back in about five, six years and about twenty million eyes will have seen it. That's twenty million people who now have a sense of modern warfare, who go into their daily lives and their roles as citizens more fully aware of what it means to engage in modern state-sponsored warfare. If they're in favor of it, they know what the truth is, and they know it's not going to be clean. If they're opposed to it, they know what the truth is.

It's interesting that you talk about *Generation Kill* being useful to both pro- and antiwar viewers. Many war films—including some of the best ones—are explicitly ideological or one-sided.

If you watch the miniseries conscientiously—whether you're conservative or liberal—the one thing that you ought to be able to come out with is that war is disorder and mayhem and brutality. Like Sherman said, it cannot be refined. With all our technology, with all our precision, with all our rules of engagement, with all the good will and best intentions, it doesn't prevent the tragedies. No viewer should ever make the mistake of thinking that war will be like some Department of Defense film of a smart bomb going through the right window, which is what war is from a distance. But it's always been that way. If you look at the film of the air raids over Germany or Tokyo, all it is is a bunch of pretty lights going off down below the bombers. On the ground, it's a firestorm and civilians are being melted alive. So in *Generation Kill* you have very eloquent statements followed by very profane statements. And you have moments of legitimate targeting and killing followed by the shooting of civilians. And it is exhilarating and mortifying for these marines to be in combat, all in the same instant. These things come right on the heels of one another, and that's the story. That's the purpose of the story: how war defies classification, how it defies political agenda, how it defies morality and immorality. It refuses to be addressed on simplistic terms. I would feel better about this war, personally, if I didn't believe that the people who ordered it did so with as callow a sense of what war is as adults can have. Never mind whether it was the right war at the right time. Did they know what they were saying when they said "war"? And I just get the impression, since they didn't serve, since they went out of their way not to serve, that maybe they didn't know. And maybe there are a lot of Americans who are in that same category. And maybe walking for seven hours with these marines serves some surrogate purpose in terms of reminding and educating Americans as to what war actually is.

You've got two pairs of actors who look very much alike, and in general it can be difficult to tell marines apart from one another. A few reviews complained about this.

In general, that's a complaint I was pretty indifferent to. You're not supposed to be able to tell them apart. In the beginning, I wanted you to know that first Humvee; it's



From left: James Ransone, Lee Tergeson, Stark Sands, Alexander Skarsgård, Billy Lush

Photo: Paul Schiraldi. Courtesy HBO.

From left: Kocher, Evan Wright, Jeff Carisalez

Photo: Paul Schiraldi. Courtesy HBO.

important to recognize Ray Person and Brad Colbert in the front seat and Trombley and the reporter in the back. And I also wanted you to recognize Lt. Fick and Lt. Col. Ferrando. And I didn't care if all the rest of them were a blur. That's how it is when you're dropped into a unit. I wanted you to feel the initial disorientation, and I wanted their personalities to emerge delicately and over time. That was part of the journey. So people were saying, "I can't tell which one said this." And I'm like, "What, are you keeping a scorecard? Just feel the movie. Feel the movie and calm down." There was going to be no quiz later on.

What kinds of thinking went into cultivating the dynamic in that first Humvee? We spend so much time there.

It's a family dynamic. We came to that very early on. Ray is the mother, and Colbert's the father. Trombley's the son, and the weird uncle that you're taking to the family reunion is the reporter. And so there are moments where Ray is positively maternal, even when he's being an asshole.

Is he being maternal talking to Cpl. Hasser after he's accidentally killed a civilian? Person makes pretty vicious jokes, and he has food smeared on his face every time he speaks to him.

Ray Person is not only the comic narration of the piece, the guy who says what's on everybody's mind but in a way that, through its sheer outrageous wit, sets it off in a new way. One of the great powerful things that Ray Person does in this film is to help diffuse the horror and the tragedy. By humping the back of Hasser's head and telling him to feel the love; by smearing food on his face and eating sloppily; by wisecracking; even by saying, "Walt has a great way to stop the cars. You just shoot the driver and stop the car"; all this is Ray's version of clinical therapy. You know: get out of yourself. Understand that you're here and we're with you. You haven't lost your friends. We're all contending with the same things. When Hasser finally comes out of his self-loathing, he does so because Ray is sitting there with Beefaroni all over his face. It's the Ray Person way of looking out for Walt Hasser. I thought he did it beautifully.

How about Sgt.-Maj. Sixta? He might be the miniseries' most outrageous character, and Neal Jones gives such a hilarious performance. Have you met the real John Sixta?

No, I haven't. I love the way he butchers English, the fucked-up plurals and the fucked-up verbage. I heard a funny story from Eric Kocher, who was our lead advisor. Kocher told me that he ran into Sixta in Oceanside—he's now out of the Marine Corps—and Sixta responded all, "Oh, hey, how are you doing?" And it was in clean English, and Eric got the distinct impression at that moment that the entire I-can't-make-a-sentence-come-out-right thing was all an act. Part of it, at least, was that Sixta had decided that all sergeant-majors are supposed to talk with a Southern accent. Sixta's from Nebraska. So there's a lot of role-playing going on, and what he's trying to do, very clearly, is to make the soldiers hate him so that they don't hate their officers. You know, "Let them all have unit solidarity over what a dickhead I am." And in its own way, that's brilliant marine psychology.

Was there anything that you couldn't do that you would have liked to?

You know, film is always subject to time and money and resources. There's only so much that you can do, and no film is ever perfectly finished. They're all abandoned, much like poetry and prose and everything else. Because we couldn't make the schedule we had to drop some sequences. Did the film survive without it? Yeah. There were places where we felt we had to go back to HBO and ask for an overage because we really needed something, or we needed an extra day because we got rained on wherever we were filming, or we needed an American actor and couldn't get by with a South African actor for a small scene where there was some dialogue. There are places where you are willing to fight the fight and do your job as a filmmaker and say, "You really should spend the extra here. I'm not kidding, I'm not being irresponsible by telling you that." And there are other places where you are doing your job by not going, by saying we'll live with this.

What are your feelings on other Iraq War films?

Well I haven't seen all of them, so I shouldn't speak to all of them. But there is a temptation on the part of Hollywood to begin with the idea that is already in their minds, and then to construct a story in service of that idea. I read Evan's book, and it resonated with me in the same way that Michael Herr's *Dispatches* resonated with me years ago. And I felt that what I needed to do was get my own emotions about the war out of the way and play their emotions about the war, find a way

to them. I don't know that anybody working in film who has been involved in an Iraq project has come to it with that thought.

Generation Kill **is very interested in the details of bureaucracy, in depicting mid-Level Army soldier-administrators. Many war movies either show you the President with his cabinet or grunts a foxhole.**

In all of our storytelling—*The Wire* and *Generation Kill*—the sympathies are with labor and middle management. We are with NCOs and the corporals. In a platoon of recon marines we're not with the officers. Most people do not want to detail bureaucracy, and it's really hard to do in a two-hour film. But in long form, to me it's fascinating. I'll tell you a place where I thought it was done well in a film, which is *The Thin Red Line*. A lot of people don't dig that film, but I do. That movie gets chain of command exactly right, and does so in a way that I think most civilians don't want to understand.

What do you mean by that? Do you find that audiences are resistant to the kind of storytelling you want to do?

There are people who want to be told that the world is what they already think it is, or they want to be very quickly told what to think. And I'm never going to be able to figure out how to get near those people because we're not using the same vocabulary. The language is fucked between us. *The Wire* had definite ideas about where we've gone wrong as a culture. *The Wire* had definite ideas about where the cities' dystopia came from. But it wasn't one overriding idea. There were many different themes, all of which were acting on each other. So here comes *Generation Kill*, and it's got issues of rules of engagement and civilians. And marines *are* being mortared from those villages, and the *fedayeen are* mixing in with the civilian population, and it *is* hard to tell combatant from non-combatant. And they are worrying about it, yet the tragedies are happening anyway because that's war. I don't want you to feel like you've arrived at some place you can live with. I don't want you to disrespect these marines, and I want you to admire, to some degree, the professionalism. But at the same time I want you to feel like these civilians really did get killed.

So there's not a lot of preaching to the choir going on.

Even liberals get tired of that. Even if you're in the choir it's boring. I want to be thrown. I want to have ideas that are challenging and worth being challenged. A substantial story is one that has two sides to it. And if you don't cheat, and stumble into one side and stick up the other one as a straw man, you've got something that's actually worth thinking about. It stays with you after you watch it or after you read it. Now you're playing an adult game in storytelling.

Generation Kill **ends with a sort of home movie—marines call them Motivational Videos, or MotoVideos—which we see Jason Lilley filming throughout the miniseries. Did the real Cpl. Lilley actually make a montage video of his unit's Iraq war experiences?**

He was going to make a MotoVideo. That was his plan to make home movies of the invasion. But when he got home, for whatever reason, his wife—they're broken up since then—erased all the film. He had tons of film. So Bravo never had its Moto. But we incorporated real footage into the video that appears at the end of *Generation Kill*. We wanted the film within the film to say everything and not be politically biased. It's them fooling around, it's kids giving the victory sign, it's them being good with the locals, it's them playing around with each other and having a great time—that's the real Brad Colbert trying to mount that donkey. Lilley's stuff was all gone, but other people—some of it's from Afghanistan, some of it's from different places. Eric collected everything that was left. And we used pieces of it.

RICHARD BECK is editor-in-chief of *Cinematic*, Harvard's student-run film journal.

ABSTRACT In this interview, David Simon, executive producer and writer (together with Ed Burns), talks about *Generation Kill*, the seven-part HBO adaptation of Evan Wright's book about the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq and the early days of occupation. Simon emphasizes the desire to stay as faithful as possible to the book as well as discussing particular characters and scenes.

KEYWORDS *Generation Kill*, David Simon, Ed Burns, Evan Wright, Iraq War

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I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete.
Rebekah Darksmith, Assistant Journals Manager

RE-WIRING BALTIMORE: THE EMOTIVE POWER OF SYSTEMICS, SERIALITY, AND THE CITY

MARSHA KINDER: *THE WIRE*'S SUCCESS DERIVES FROM THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN SYSTEMIC ANALYSIS AND EMOTIONAL ENGAGEMENT WITH COMPELLING CHARACTERS

Among the most striking things about *The Wire* are the breadth and depth of its systemic analysis of urban corruption in Baltimore and the emotional power it elicits. I will argue that these dynamics are made possible by leveraging the full narrative potential of television, particularly the expansive narrative space provided by seriality and ensemble casting, which accommodates the city as the primary unit of analysis.

THE NETWORKED CITY AS INTERTEXT

Through its network of intertextual allusions (to TV, cinema, literature, theater, and journalism), which continues growing through the final episode (with its pointed references to Shakespeare, Kafka, and H. L. Mencken), *The Wire* explicitly mentions both precursors and foils, with which it should be compared, training us how to remix or resist what we previously have been encouraged to admire. In season 5, metro editor Gus Haynes (Clark Johnson) tells his staff of writers at the *Baltimore Sun* (the paper where series creator David Simon was a crime reporter for twelve years): "There are a million stories in this naked city, but you mooks only have to bring in two or three." When Simon came to visit TV critic Howard Rosenberg's class at USC on March 3, 2008, he acknowledged *Naked City* as an important influence on *The Wire*. (Unless otherwise noted, quotations from Simon in this article are taken from this visit.) Running from 1958 to 1963 on ABC, this classic TV cop series broke new ground with its gritty realism and its narrative focus on New York City. Yet an urban focus doesn't guarantee systemic analysis, as demonstrated not only by *Naked City* but also by one of *The Wire's* primary foils, *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*, the most popular crime series currently on TV. In the final season of *The Wire*, a glib psychologist offers his services as a criminal profiler, citing his previous work for *CSI*, and is summarily rejected. Set in glamorous Las Vegas, the city where no one is held accountable for their actions and where chance rules supreme, *CSI* uses its location as ironic backdrop for its optimistic depiction of infallible scientific police work, which spares no expense. But *CSI* never illuminates its urban context—either its actual setting of Las Vegas or the city of Los Angeles, whose race-based trials of O. J. Simpson and the cops who battered Rodney King and their disturbing outcomes help explain the popular appeal of this escapist procedural series. As strategic sites for its formulaic spin-offs, *CSI* chose Miami and New York, cities associated thematically with international drug wars and the terrorist disaster of 9/11, and commercially with popular precursors like *Miami Vice*, *NYPD Blue*, and *New York Undercover*.

In contrast, *The Wire* is committed to a systemic analysis of Baltimore, combining narrative strategies from two earlier TV Baltimore crime series, with which Simon was personally connected. *Homicide: Life on the Street* (1993–99), a realistic TV police series based on Simon's nonfiction book, *Homicide: A Year on the Killing Streets*, focused primarily on cops rather than criminals who changed from week to week; and Simon's own 2000 HBO miniseries, *The Corner*, based on a nonfiction book he co-wrote with Ed Burns (*The Corner: A Year in the Life of an Inner-City Neighborhood*), had a narrower narrative field (one year in the life, on one corner, in one season comprised of six episodes). This series was better suited to the family as the basic unit of analysis, for it lacked the broad canvas of *The Wire*, whose first season combined cops from homicide with drug dealers on the corner. (The casting of Clark Johnson, one of the cops from *Homicide*, in *The Wire* emphasizes the connection between the two series.) Simon says when he first proposed *The Wire* series to HBO, he mentioned only the drug war—not his goal of building a city and performing a systemic analysis that would dramatize the dire need for policy reform.

Yet this narrative focus on the city distinguishes both *The Wire* and *Naked City* from other successful serial crime fiction structured around the family—like the HBO series *The*

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Bubbles on the way home

Photo: Paul Schiraldi. Courtesy HBO.

Sopranos (1999–2007) and Francis Ford Coppola's cinematic *Godfather* trilogy (1972, 1974, and 1990), neither of whose systemic analyses rivals the breadth of that found in *The Wire*. Instead, their focus on the multi-generational crime family brings a strong dimension of melodrama into the gangster genre. The Corleones may stand in for America, but it is the family's ups and downs and internecine betrayals that raise the story to tragedy, and Coppola's casting of Robert De Niro, Marlon Brando, and Al Pacino that keeps us sutured into who's in charge. *The Sopranos* (which ran for six seasons) used its enlarged canvas to go into greater emotional depth for its array of complex characters. But, despite the breadth and high-quality acting of its ensemble cast, there was never any doubt over who was the protagonist: it was Tony Soprano's family that was being investigated and his memories, phobias, and dreams that were being subjected to depth analysis.

SYSTEMIC SUTURE

While *The Wire* is not the first work of crime fiction to perform such a systemic analysis of corruption, it may be the most successful in making it emotionally compelling; for systemics usually demand a critical distance that is incompatible with most forms of character identification. I am arguing that the uniqueness of the series depends on this combination, whose most interesting precedents (both precursors and foils) come from cinema rather than television. As foils, I'm thinking of the emotional distance in political films like Francesco Rosi's *Salvatore Giuliano* (1960), a dialectic reconstruction of the famous bandit's relationship to political and economic power, or in most of Jean-Luc Godard's reflexive works from the late 1960s and early 1970s, including *Weekend* and *Two or Three Things I Know About Her* (both 1967), which reject realism and emotional suture altogether. Significantly, Simon cites Stanley Kubrick's *Paths of Glory* (1957) as his primary cinematic model and "the most important political film in history," a war film that succeeds in combining systemic analysis with more traditional forms of realism and emotional identification. Yet one can also find this combination in other cinematic precursors *within* the crime film genre, like Fritz Lang's *M* (1931) and John Mackenzie's *The Long Good Friday* (1980). In moving their focus from a fascinating individual criminal to a broader analysis of the culture that creates and destroys him, they design narrative strategies that are expanded in *The Wire*.

M moves from the compulsive pedophile (played by Peter Lorre) to the police and criminals pursuing him, who increasingly become mirror images of each other. This reflective relationship (like the one between drug dealers and cops in *The Wire*'s first season) proves more terrifying than the irrational acts of the child-killer (however heinous his uncontrollable urges and crimes). The relationship becomes central to the film's systemic analysis of Germany, which prefigured the rise of the Third Reich. This kind of reflective relationship between both sides of the law can also be found in later serial crime fiction like the *Godfather* trilogy, but nowhere is it developed more expansively than in *The Wire*.

The Long Good Friday focuses on an ambitious London gangster, Harold Shand (Bob Hoskins) who, like *The Wire*'s equally charismatic drug dealer Stringer Bell (Idris Elba), tries to go legit by investing in his city's docklands as a future site for the Olympics. Describing himself as, "not a politician, but a businessman with an historical sense and global perspective," he fails to understand how the emergent power of the IRA challenges his old-fashioned conception of empire. His political naivety prevents him from seeing beyond the gangster paradigm. In the final close-up when Harold is

about to be whacked, he finally realizes his opponents are international terrorists rather than local mobsters, that this movie is a European political thriller rather than an Anglicized Hollywood gangster film, and that he has misunderstood the power dynamics both of the genre and of globalism. If we can't read this close-up, then we misunderstand the movie and its prophetic analysis of Thatcherism in the 1980s. Similarly, despite Stringer's intelligence and driving ambitions, he is still too naive to understand the power dynamics that drive the so-called legitimate worlds of business, law, and politics (dynamics that his young successor Marlo Stanfield [Jamie Hector] will also have to fathom). In both crime narratives, this last-minute gain in systemic understanding helps reconcile these gangsters to their premature death, as if it's a fitting tragic payoff for their respective transformations.

Despite the deep pessimism of *The Wire*'s systemic analysis of our crumbling cities and pervasive corruption, unlike these precursors, it achieves a delicate emotional balance, for it is not merely one charismatic outlaw who must be transcended, but several promising yet vulnerable characters who generate a series of transformative moments season after season. As actor Jamie Hector put it in an article titled "*Wire* Leaves a Legacy of Hope," which appeared in the Sunday *Los Angeles Times* on the night the final episode was aired, "I believe he [David Simon] is saying there is hope through the people in the institutions" (March 9, 2008, E1). Not restricted to any single family, race, class, gender, sexual persuasion, or generation (though the youngsters from season four are the most poignant), these promising characters keep emerging on both sides of the law. The emotional power of the series depends on this dynamic tension between, on the one hand, having so many vibrant characters with enormous potential and, on the other hand, seeing how the culture is wired to destroy them. What results is serial tragedy with a systemic form of suture, which inspires awe and pity week after week and makes it difficult for viewers to turn away.

Although Simon claims that *The Wire* is more about class rather than race ("I just happened to be doing a series about a city that's 65% black … *Homicide* already covered race"), the fact that most of these complex characters are African American and most of them brilliantly played by actors we've never previously seen—these facts alone create a sense of hope. As actress Sonja Sohn, who plays Kima Greggs, puts it in the same *Los Angeles Times* feature: "This cast might not be here if there was no hope in the ghetto" (E22). *The Wire*'s emphasis on black characters marks an important departure from successful serial crime precursors like the *Godfather* trilogy and *The Sopranos*, whose more traditional Italian American characters share middle America's racism against African Americans, a dimension that might regrettably make it easier for white viewers to identify with them. Aware that this emphasis on race might reduce the size of his audience but determined to pursue it as part of his systemic analysis, Simon acknowledges: "We have more working black actors in key roles than pretty much all the other shows on the air. And yet you still hear people claim they can't find good African-American actors." It is this "richness of the black community," as actor Lance Reddick (who plays Cedric Daniels) calls it, that makes the series "so different from anything that's been on television" (E22).

Yet we also are aware that every character in the ensemble cast (whether black or white, and no matter how seemingly central) can be killed off at any moment, as in real life, without threatening the systemic level of the series. Nowhere is this awareness more painful than in the murder of the courageous black homosexual assassin Omar Little (brilliantly played by Michael K. Williams), one of the most powerful characters in the series. This chilling event catches us off-guard as much as it does Omar, for he is gunned down not by Marlo's "muscle," Chris (Gbenga Akinnagbe) and Snoop (Felicia Pearson) who are doggedly hunting him down, but by the vicious little street-corner kid, Kenard (Thuliso Dingwall). In Rosenberg's class, Simon reminded us that midway through season 3, there's a shot of Kenard playing in the street with other kids and picking up a stick and shouting, "It's my turn to play Omar." *The Wire* presents three generations of street killers (Kenard, Marlo, and Omar) as victims of the city, whose failed institutions waste their potential. That's why the *Baltimore Sun*'s failure to cover Omar's death, and the dysfunctional police lab's misidentification of his corpse, are almost as chilling as his murder. As Simon says, the series is all about subtext (what's omitted) and the need to change policy. Yet we care deeply about these issues because of our emotional engagement with these characters who emerge from the ensemble cast.

SERIALITY AND THE ENSEMBLE CAST

As a miniseries spread over five seasons, *The Wire* has been structured to take full advantage of television's expanded narrative field. It doesn't merely track the longitudinal history of a police investigation or repeat formulaic situations. Each season *The Wire* shifts the focus to a different segment of society: the drug wars, the docks, city politics, education, and the media. It thereby avoids the endgame of the ordinary TV series, as described by Janet Murray in *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace* (Free Press, 1997): "When every variation of the situation has been played out, as in the final season of a long-running series, the under-

Clockwise from top left: Daniels and Pearlman, Greggs growing distant from her partner, Omar at work, Snoop and Chris, Kenard the unlikely assassin, Stringer at the point of death.

© 2002–2008 Home Box Office. DVD: HBO Home Video.

lying fantasy comes to the surface . . . We can look at it directly, with less anxiety, but we also find it less compelling" (169–70).

Despite its hyper-realism and its array of black characters, the first season is the most conventional segment, for the drug war is a typical topic for crime fiction. Though the series transforms the genre, it first hooks us with the traditional lures of what is being transformed. Like the *Godfather* trilogy, *The Wire* begins with a compelling narrative segment (season 1) that is firmly positioned within the genre, and lets the second segment perform the dramatic rupture. Titled "The Port," season 2 focuses on the loss of blue-collar jobs at the docks, the weakening of unions, and the rise of global capitalism—a dramatic shift that felt like it was introducing an entirely new series. Not only is a new set of characters introduced, but their networked crimes go global. The mysterious bad guy (played by Bill Raymond) is called "the Greek," though his "muscle" is Ukrainian and Israeli, and the new crime family is East European, as are the prostitutes being illegally imported and victimized. This move evokes another cinematic precursor about dock workers (made by a Greek)—Elia Kazan's Oscar-winning *On the Waterfront* (1954). The evocation encourages us to compare what has happened in the interim not only to the unions but also to the rivalries between movies and television for hyper-realistic representation and systemic analysis, as if the narrative format of cinema is now insufficiently expansive for covering the complex networked society. The tragic ending of season 2 was even bleaker than that of its cinematic precursor, with two generations of the Sobotka family totally wiped out and with the only survivors being the cops, the female love interest Beadie Russell (Amy Ryan), who hooks up with Jimmy McNulty (Dominic West) in season 3, and the mysterious Greeks. This allusion also underscores Simon's claim that his primary dramatic model is Greek tragedy, where characters with potential are doomed by larger forces (in this case failing institutions rather than fickle gods). This is the season that feels most unified and self-contained. According to Simon, they got it right and had nothing more to say on this subject. This season performed its function of raising the series to a systemic level of tragedy.

THE CONFLICT BETWEEN SYSTEMIC ANALYSIS AND EMOTIONAL SUTURE

In season 2 we also begin to experience a conflict between this systemic analysis of Baltimore and our emotional engagement with the characters with whom we choose to identify. Although in season 1 it's the combination of these two dimensions that define the uniqueness of *The Wire*, over the arc of the series the conflict between them keeps building until it reaches a climax in season 5, with the storyline of the fake serial killer. Significantly, this scheme is concocted by McNulty as a "creative" way of getting the funding Homicide needs to take down the reigning drug lord, Marlo Stanfield. But by the end of the series, viewers are forced to choose between their commitment to a sympathetic character like McNulty or to the truth, which, as in tragedy, is made to seem an absolute value, only because characters are willing to sacrifice anything for it.

Despite the emphasis on black characters, from the very first episode *The Wire* tempts us into thinking that Jimmy McNulty might be the protagonist of the series. Not only is he one of the cops who provide continuity across all five seasons, but he gets the first credit in the opening titles and his face was prominently featured on the posters and on the cover of season 1's DVD. Although Simon claims he cast British actor Dominic West because all the American actors who read for the part had seen too many American cop series and were unable to go beyond the stereotypes, McNulty evokes Al Pacino's Serpico (who is mentioned in one of the episodes)—a self-destructive, white anti-hero who has trouble with authority and whom many female characters find appealing. The fact that he fits this stereotype becomes ironic in season 5 when an FBI psychologist profiling the alleged serial killer comes up with a description that perfectly evokes McNulty. The show continues to monitor McNulty's ups and downs (on the job, on and off the wagon, and in and out of relationships with women), perhaps because, like the black, gay drug addict Bubbles (one of the most likeable characters in the series, played by Andre Royo), he is willing to accept blame for his own actions and their impact on other underdogs.

Since no single individual can solve all of the systemic problems raised in the series, we soon realize that it's the relations that count. From the beginning we are led to compare McNulty with at least three other sets of characters. First, he is compared with his former black partners in the Homicide Division: Bunk Moreland (Wendell Pierce), who is more reliable and less flashy, and his subsequent partner, Kima Greggs, a lesbian who shares similar domestic problems with her partner that McNulty experiences with his ex-wife. Despite McNulty's close emotional ties to both, they harshly condemn his "fake serial killer" plot. Secondly, McNulty is compared to two brainy black cops who share his antagonism toward authority and his passion for inventing creative ways of fighting crime. Yet their schemes (unlike McNulty's) are *not* based on lies. Lester Freamon (Clarke Peters) designs the original plan for wire-tapping the Barksdale gang, and thus is willing to use resources from the fake serial killer plot to revive his own scheme. Bunny Colvin (Robert Wisdom) sets up

Clockwise from top left: the docks, smugglers' diner, newsroom, school

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an unauthorized buffer zone called "Hamsterdam" where dealers and addicts are not arrested, a scheme (like McNulty's) that enables cops to focus on other more important crimes. Although this plan brings down Baltimore's crime rate, Bunny is forced to retire. The schemes of all three characters prove successful, yet once the authorities discover them, the outcomes are reversed, which demonstrates there's something terribly wrong with public policy. All three schemes demonstrate that individuals *can* make a difference, even if they can't single-handedly solve all of Baltimore's systemic problems.

McNulty is also compared with two deceptive white men from other sectors, who at first seem to have enormous potential. In season 3, Thomas Carcetti (Aiden Gillen) wins the electoral race for mayor as "the great white hope," but by the end of the season proves to be just as corrupt as the black politicians he replaced. Carcetti's connection to McNulty is strengthened by their boyish good looks and their sexual involvement with the same powerful woman (Carcetti's abrasive, campaign manager, Theresa D'Agostino, played by Brandy Burre). In season 5, McNulty's compared to the ambitious journalist Scott Templeton (Tom McCarthy), who also fabricates stories. Early in the season, McNulty says, "I wonder what it feels like to work in a real fucking police department," a line later echoed by Scott: "I wonder what it's like to work at a real newspaper." Although it's easy to condemn both Carcetti and Templeton as self-centered careerists with their eyes on the prize (the governor's mansion or a Pulitzer), it's harder to condemn a self-destructive figure like McNulty, whose motives are rarely self-serving. He plays Huck Finn to their Tom Sawyers, yet all three schemers become (as McNulty puts it in the final episode) "trapped in the same lie." The plot of the fake serial killer violates the commitment to truth and realism that *The Wire* demands

Clockwise from top left: Freamon's wire, "Hamsterdam," Baltimore cityscape, McNulty

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throughout the series. In the final season we are forced to choose between our commitment to a truthful systemic analysis and our emotional engagement with McNulty, a painful choice already made by his former partners—by Russell (who was ready to leave him), Bunk (who continually condemns him), and Greggs (who exposes the plot to Commissioner Daniels, played by Lance Reddick).

Without betraying McNulty, Bunk chooses the truth, which is hardly surprising. In the first episode of the final season, one of Bunk's lines of dialogue is chosen as an epigraph: "The bigger the lie, the more they believe." Though Bunk was referring to standard interrogation methods found on most conventional cop series, *The Wire* makes us read it (like the other epigraphs) systemically—emphasizing its resonance across the entire series. Like Bunk, the series ultimately chooses truth over emotion, a priority that distinguishes *The Wire* from other TV crime series, yet it acknowledges that many of its careerist characters still stick with the lie. When his fake plot is exposed and he's still not arrested, McNulty rewrites Bunk's line: "The lie's so big, people can't live with it."

That's why *The Wire* ends with the media and focuses on the city newspaper, an institution whose mission is to discover and disseminate the truth. Yet city newspapers across America are rapidly disappearing. Forced to compete with the Internet as a primary source of news, they can no longer afford to retain expensive international bureaus (which are supposed to gather rather than merely remix the news). And their local coverage is forced to compete with the entertainment model of television journalism. According to Simon, in some ways papers like the *Baltimore Sun* may *deserve* to disappear because they have failed to cover the most important stories in their city, a journalistic task that has been taken over by his own fictional TV series. *The Wire* clearly blames these failed

institutions more than the individual criminals they create and destroy. As Snoop puts it, just before she is whacked, "Deserve got nothin' to do with it."

Before the first episode of this final season had been broadcast, some critics were already claiming that its analysis of the media would be less complex and more Manichean than that found in earlier seasons, perhaps anticipating the usual endgame for a series. Or maybe it was because the final season was focusing on Simon's former home base, the *Baltimore Sun*, where he had worked several years as a crime reporter (and might have personal scores to settle). But no matter how thorough the show's indictment against the media might be, *The Wire* itself is still a powerful counter-example—even though it attracted a relatively small audience (around four million viewers per episode, less than half of what *The Sopranos* normally drew). Despite all the critical praise (for its innovative structure, hyper-realism, and brilliant array of black characters), *The Wire* never won an Emmy (whereas *The Sopranos* won twenty-two). Maybe its cast was too black and its analysis too systemic for middle America. Yet, *The Wire* still stands out as a subversive alternative—one that maintains the delicate balance between hope and desperation and makes Snoop's dying words reflexive: "Deserve got nothin' to do with it."

THE FINAL EPISODE: SYSTEMIC CLOSURE

The final ninety-minute episode leverages a number of *The Wire*'s earlier strategies to deliver narrative closure while still maintaining systemic suture. The system of rewards and punishments remains consistent with Snoop's realistic analysis. Corrupt careerists like Templeton, Carcetti, Commissioner Bill Rawls (John Doman), and double-dealing Herc Hauk (Domenisk Lombardozzi) are rewarded for their dishonesty with big prizes or promotions. In contrast, those with integrity who tried to improve the system—Daniels, McNulty, Freamon, and honest reporter Alma Gutierrez (Michelle Paress)—are shut out of their institutions where their commitment could (or should) have made a difference. Yet the systemic analysis also enables us to perceive a generational pattern of replacements that might leave us with a glimmer of hope. Michael (Tristan Wilds) steps up to replace Omar; Marlo is forced to follow the path pioneered by Stringer; and (if he's lucky and honest) Dukie (Jermaine Crawford), whose parents were junkies, begins the painful cycle of addiction and recovery that was earlier pursued by Bubbles. As the only character in the series who deserves the modest reward he receives, Bubbles is the one exception to this corrupt system of injustice: for, he is finally welcomed upstairs and allowed to dine with his sister and nephew. Unlike the others, he can go home again. As actress Sonja Sohn puts it, "Bubbles is the only character on the whole show that represents hope, and hope that has succeeded at the end of the series" (*Los Angeles Times*, E22).

Yet McNulty also reaps both rewards and punishments. Once his fake serial killer plot is exposed by his former partner Greggs, he has to relinquish his job as detective, which has been the center of his life. Like Freamon, Alma, and Marlo, he can't go home again. Yet his refusal to blame all the fake murders on the copycat killer helps him regain other positions that easily could have been lost. He is allowed to stay at home in the relationship with Russell; he is paired with Freamon as "partners in crime"; he is eulogized by Sergeant Jay Landsman (Delaney Williams) in his "fake wake" as "the black sheep" who is "natural po-lice"); and, perhaps most important, he re-emerges as potential protagonist. In the process, our emotional engagement with him is restored. Besides being the center of attention at the wake, McNulty is singled out from the ensemble cast in several long takes. These singular moments with McNulty are followed by montage sequences either of Baltimore's cityscape, the fates of other characters, or the city's ordinary citizens, sequences that use the ensemble to reaffirm systemic analysis. Thus the combination of emotional engagement and systemic analysis is restored, and we are left having it both ways: the protagonist is both McNulty and the city of Baltimore, both the individual and the ensemble.

The interplay between individuals and ensemble is also emphasized by a series of key words and phrases that recur throughout the episode like a musical refrain. Some of the phrases express fear ("keep my name out of it"); other words are more hopeful—like the recuperation of "clean" (as in Gus's "I remember clean" and Daniels's insistence on "clean stats"), and the reaffirmation of "home" (which reasserts *The Wire*'s commitment to Baltimore). In this final episode, although several characters refer to the many meanings of home, it is McNulty who gets the last word. As he stands at the side of the freeway, looking at the cityscape, he turns to the homeless man he has brought back to Baltimore, and says: "Let's go home."

Illustrations for this article were selected by Victor Bautissta.

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KEYWORDS David Simon, *The Wire*, Baltimore, serial tragedy, systemic suture

ABSTRACT *The Wire* is distinguished by the depth of its systemic analysis of Baltimore's urban corruption and by the emotional power it elicits. By presenting so many vibrant characters with enormous potential and showing how our culture is wired to destroy them, it creates serial tragedy with a systemic form of suture.

THE LOST BOYS OF BALTIMORE: BEAUTY AND DESIRE IN THE HOOD

JAMES S. WILLIAMS ARGUES THAT *THE WIRE* PUSHES THE BOUNDARIES OF RACE, TELEVISION REALISM, AND SPECTATORSHIP

One of the many glories of *The Wire* is the way it blows apart the traditional limits in depicting African Americans on television. We have at last a program that covers almost every major aspect of urban black life; that cuts across age, class, and sexuality; and captures in each case the appropriate idiom, including authentic street vernacular. This achievement survives the shaky final series, where some of the show's most potent and groundbreaking black characters are either written out (Omar peremptorily felled by a kid gangsta), reduced to caricature (the dynamic, out-lesbian detective Greggs reversed into a demure and practically desexualized part-time foster-mother), or simply lose their way (cool sleuth Freamon allowing himself to become mired in the improbable plot to fabricate a serial killer).[‡] One might wonder, too, why it is that Bubbles has to clean up his act so literally in order to emerge from underground and take his place at the table, renouncing in the process all trace of his earlier life of addiction on the streets, including his propensity for intense male relationships. These are questions that will no doubt be analyzed at length in the context of *The Wire*'s general politics of representation and its success in not only exposing the fatal ideology of racist thinking and profiling but also critiquing and transcending it (for example, the recurring association of "black" with dirt, as when Officer Colicchio states after being tricked by some corner boys into picking up a brown bag of dog excrement as opposed to a drug stash: "They're all dirty anyway").

What I would like to do here is something very specific: to explore the representation of black masculinity and sexuality in *The Wire*. My inquiry is inspired by the brilliant way the show establishes and develops a range of clearly defined homosocial spaces, from the crack dens of the hood and the gangsta boardroom to the office detail, prison, neighborhood gym, and high-school classroom. These produce a series of close male buddy relationships between, for instance, Bunk and McNulty, Michael and Duquan, Carver and Hauk, and, of course, Bubbles with first his white junkie sidekick Johnny, then the young black addict Sherrod. They also create a proliferation of competing father figures, including Cutty, Colvin, Proposition Joe, Prez, Carver, even Marlo, who oversee the perilous passage from boyhood to manhood in the ghetto and help to make the fourth season set in the public school system perhaps the most gut-wrenching. Yet these are only the most obvious thematic and narrative markers of black masculinity, and do not account for all the mysteries and complexities of male representation in *The Wire*. What I will attempt to do, therefore, is focus on the specifically visual and stylistic features that recur in the show, no matter the different directors, directors of photography, and editors involved. I hope in the process to reveal some of the concrete reasons why the show makes for such original and utterly compulsive viewing.

Let us first fully acknowledge that *The Wire* is propelled by the crude and often sordid vocabulary of homoerotic innuendo and homophobic machismo. At one extreme is the playfully aggressive linguistic dicking around by police officers that serves to bond them together. Bunk to a fellow black colleague: "Did he [McNulty] fuck you?"; "He fucked himself." Nothing is left unverbalized in the unit, and the term "homoerotic" is even employed by Landsman in the very last episode. At the other extreme is the endemic misogyny of gangsta-speak where words like "bitch," "bushwhacker" and "faggot" carry far greater weight. Homosexuality can never be simply a laughing matter in the ghetto, and the corner boys frighteningly in advance of their years are always watching their backs, literally. Indeed, a destructive, almost primitive fear and paranoia stalks the hood. The physical threat of Omar—a lone gay wolf referred to as "dicksucker" and, in even more ugly abbreviated form, "dick-suck"—is permanent and real. In the case of the adolescent Michael, his continual need to assert his masculinity is born out of a profound inse-

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curity, such that he immediately suspects the intentions of the benign Cutty and is even prepared to shoot him in the thigh. He engineers the murder of his own delinquent stepfather for reasons that crucially cannot be articulated, although Chris somehow intuits them, perhaps because he has suffered something similar himself. After summarily interrogating the father with Snoop, accusing him of being a pedophile and having sexual relations with men while in prison (the latter is not denied—"A man gotta bust his nut"), Chris then beats him into a pulp, beyond all recognition. This recalls an earlier moment in *The Wire* when Omar's lover Brandon was first tortured then brutally murdered by the Barksdale crew before being left for public view as the unspeakable gay horror. Chris, Michael, and Snoop will come together later to eliminate a member of their own gang, June Bug, who had dared to cast aspersions on Marlo's gangstahood.

Yet by way of compensation *The Wire* also offers something that is of largely visual power, namely an eroticization of the hood. This process, what I call the lure of the aesthetic, is already set in train by the instruments of police surveillance (CCTV camera, telephoto lens) which make the black figures caught in the dead zones of the mid-rise projects and on the steps of row houses an object of the camera's obsessive, almost voyeuristic gaze. We are continually presented with *tableaux vivants* of corner boys, hoppers, drug slingers, and hustlers, whether alone or in formation, isolated in a frame that remains curiously silent and impervious to the sounds and distractions of popular youth culture like hip-hop and dating. Gang members must observe the code of no drugs and alcohol, even, it would appear, sex, or, like Wallace, risk being eliminated altogether (one of the very few occasions the Barksdale crew enjoy a house party with girls, drinks, and drugs occurs when their leader Avon is away in prison). Occupying such a rarefied and ascetic screen space, they appear all the more primed and accessible yet also disposable and endlessly replaceable. In fact, *The Wire* evokes at times the imagery of black homo-thug gay porn websites which revolve on the daily turnover of virtually indistinguishable fresh hot dudes (an impression furthered by the official HBO–*The Wire* website where the images of the cast are arranged in series and displayed with brief bios). The (literally) "to-die-for" black gangsta *thugz* like Stringer, Marlo, Avon, Bodie, D'Angelo, Wee-Bey, and Chris compete for the viewer's attention with dashing black officers such as Carver and Sydnor, complemented by their closely cropped white colleagues, hunks Colicchio and Dozerman. With their mean poses, impassive stares, and fixed killer smiles, these sad and doomed lost boys constitute in their heightened availability and vulnerability one of the great unavowed pleasures of

The ambiguity of a glance

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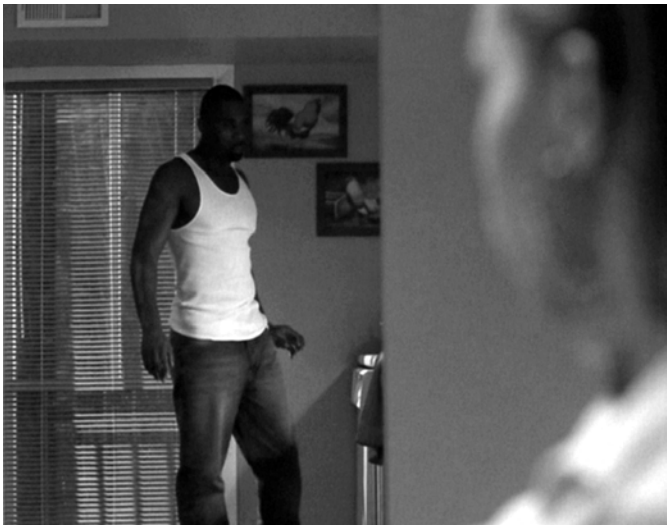
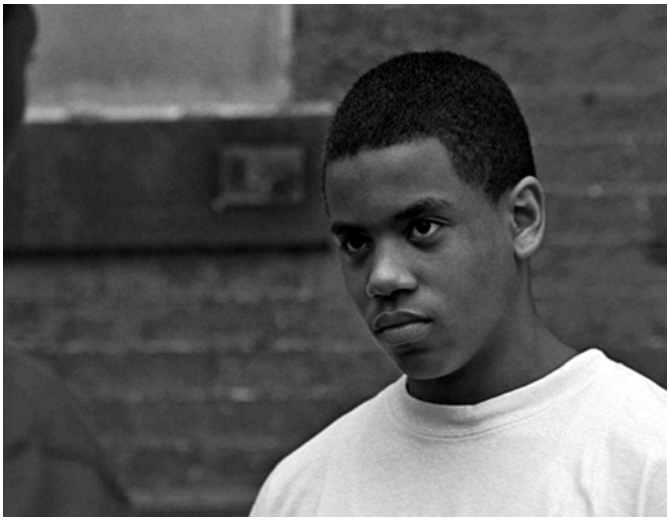
The Wire. What is one person's urban nightmare is another man's fantasy.

A homoerotics of style is created by the very way the camera "takes" its young male figures. We are drawn into rituals of spectatorial desire through the stylized representation and mise-en-scène of the black body. Typically, we encounter it first in moody long shot and at an oblique angle before zooming gently toward it in extreme close-up (occasionally also from behind) and finally panning or tracking away. The effect created is of a depth of field magnified by framing, the play of light and shade, focusing and refocusing, and the extended duration of the shot. The camera is almost always moving in *The Wire*, but these elegantly choreographed and discrete scenes stand out dramatically from the rest of the action, cutting as it were vertically into a horizontal continuum and, in the process, queering *cinematically* the standard codes of television realism. Only young black male characters receive this degree of visual investment which at times achieves a Cocteau-like intensity and sensory rhythm. By contrast, both the female and the white male figures (including those "as-good-as-white" like Former Mayor Royce and Commissioner Burrell) are filmed largely in flat mid-shot without any significant play of focus, distance, or speed. The domestic scene between Stringer and D'Angelo's former girlfriend, Donette, is instructive: whereas he moves and "flows" (a key term in *The Wire*), she is held static within the frame. The same occurs when Stringer encounters his lawyer Levy in his office: while Levy remains fixed in his seat in medium shot, we move slowly and irresistibly towards Stringer in close-up on the other side of the table.

HOMOEROTIC FLOW, UNNAMEABLE ATTRACTION





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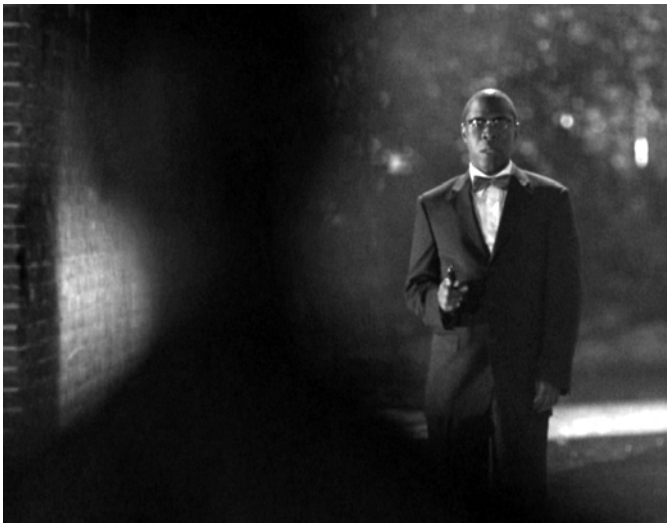
Such is the erotic "follow-through" of the black male figure in *The Wire*, and it produces some remarkable homoerotic sequences. Here are just a few: stirred out of bed one morning and fully naked, Omar looks out of the window (a subjective point-of-view shot) before then turning round to meet our gaze in a long shot from the adjoining room, the precise framing emphasized by the open doorway (he eventually leaves for the grocery store in a silk dressing-gown accompanied by the kids' refrain "Omar strollin'"); Omar in prison kissing below the ear the black inmate he is just about to knife brutally and bloodily in the buttocks (Omar: "Shame we hadn't more time together. We could have made us a couple of babies"); Marlo's face juxtaposed with that of Avon caught as a reflection in the glass partition of the prison visitors' room (Avon nods fraternally at Marlo having declared he has "nuthin' but love" for the Westside crews, a gesture that neatly reprises their first act of recognition during an arraignment hearing when Avon mouthed "Marlo?"); the sultry love scene between Greggs and her new fling photographed naked on bed from a high angle (the only fully fledged sex scene in *The Wire*); Stringer and Avon wrestling on the floor in sweaty close-up, the movement of the camera suddenly suspended when blood seeps through Avon's white vest and all one hears for a good half-minute is the throbbing sound of intense exhalation and physical ache; the extraordinary meeting of gazes between Marlo and his potential new henchmen Bodie and Michael, each a visual seduction sealed by the use of shot/counter-shot (in the case of the latter, a doe-eyed Marlo wets his lips and breaks into a smile: "We cool"). It is, of course, because Omar is already a half-mythical figure living in the shadows that he attracts a cinematic glow whenever he appears. When he whistles his way into frame at the start of the penultimate episode of season 3, he provokes what can only be described as an urban Western duel with Brother Mouzone complete with atmospheric night-time lighting, low angles, and a stunning series of shot/counter-shots that alternate between long shot and extreme close-up. With its impressive high production values and Omar threatening with his hangdog grin to "empty out half his mag," this sequence alone reinvents the entire standard iconography of the hood.

Just as *The Wire* is always moving us centrifugally out of any reassuring fixed central urban space like the Westside ghetto (and within that the micro-space of Colvin's short-lived "legal" drug zone) into new communal spaces (the port, suburbia, upstate correction centers, etc.), so it forces us continually to extend our notion of male desire by confronting us with an unnameable longing for male intimacy. In addition to the highly crafted visual scenes just mentioned are the regular instances of grace and flow when we "ride," as it were, with the black male characters in privileged, intimate moments. They include Avon and Wee-Bey leaning against the fence during an outside basketball game to parade their buffed upper torsos; Omar tenderly putting his hands around his new young lover Renaldo who sports a Free Love T-shirt; a close-up of Avon whispering softly into Stringer's ear that he is his "baby"; the camera slowly alighting on Marlo perched statuesquely on the steps of a row house; the changing play of focus when Omar is filmed chatting with his blind banker Butchie outside the latter's bar from a range of distances. And many more. The teasing play of distance and proximity is a key factor here, and one of the real joys of the series is the way we move *physically* closer to certain characters as they evolve, notably Carver who becomes progressively more natural and loose—more "street"—as he begins to understand with greater sensitivity the precarious condition of boys like Randy. His moment of bonding with Cutty at the gym, filmed in shot/counter-shot and culminating with beaming smiles in a tight two-shot, is a beautiful moment. As for Marlo, we catch him at his most tender with his pigeons which he claims to admire for the way they "take care of the young'uns." We don't need to refer back to the phallic birds of Ancient Greece, nor indeed ponder the titles of films like Mike Nichols's *The Birdcage* (1996), to appreciate the homoerotic frisson when he fondly caresses the head of one pigeon with his long, delicate fingers. Marlo is a model of sublimated desire and controlled aggression, a fact accentuated by his slender physique and almost feminine grace (his only serious sexual encounter with a woman, we note, results in her brutal murder). The increasing, baroque excess of senseless violence in the final series threatens, however, to turn the homoerotic into the gratuitous and even camp, for instance, the frankly absurd spectacle of Dozerman suddenly stripping off to the waist (due to nits in the grass, he claims unconvincingly) when surveilling a warehouse with Sydnor; or Mayor Carcetti, in the words of one unimpressed journalist, acting "oh so butch."

The Wire's peculiar insistence on the aesthetic is unlike anything ever seen before on television, and that includes its NBC forerunner, *Homicide: Life on the Street* (based on David Simon's nonfiction book *Homicide: A Year on the Killing Streets*), where no formal distinction is really made in the visual representation of the different groups in Baltimore and where a more uniform documentary style characterized by rapid, jump-cut editing prevails, along with the occasional use of musical montages and shot repetition. In fact, *The Wire* recalls more the lyrical moments of Charles Burnett's

CINEMATIC SHOWDOWN: OMAR AND BROTHER MOUZONE



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self-conscious art film, *Killer of Sheep* (1977), perhaps the only comparable all-round visualization of the urban black male experience in the U.S. (in this case Watts). The formal portrayal of its young boys and men is very different, however, one might say almost innocent (close handheld camera, fixed-frame compositions, motivated tracking shots). This is because the family circle still remains intact, however weak and troubled its paternal figures, and united by the signs of a recognizable black culture in song and music. By eschewing any kinds of special effects and insisting on the frontality and "thereness" of the subject, the aestheticization of the black male form in *The Wire* has arguably more in common with Robert Mapplethorpe's controversial late portraits of black men in graphic close-up, though without the deliberate shock value.

There remains, of course, a fundamental paradox and irony to *The Wire*'s homoerotic representation of young black men, since it is reliant on the very distance it maintains toward its black characters. After all, we are never made privy to the daily personal lives of Marlo, Avon, and the rest, any more than we know much about the private circumstances of the main black police officers like Bunk, Freamon, and Carver (the exception being Daniels once he leaves his estranged wife and moves in with his new white partner, Assistant State's Attorney Pearlman). For the most part they remain strictly on business and on call, to the point even that when Michael goes to the theme park with Duquan and becomes a teenager again, joking and chatting up girls, the effect is strangely unreal. Moreover, we never enter "naturally" into all-black private spaces outside gangsta hours, as we do, for instance, in the case of the white dockers where we are invited almost too easily into the extended family home of the Sobotkas. Michael's junkie household is presented, by contrast, as a clinical case study of parental abuse. The exceptions to this rule—which serve, of course, merely to prove it—are the rather shortlived family space shared by Greggs and Cheryl, and the unashamed intimacy enjoyed by Omar and Renaldo who even find time to watch videos together. Complete with Omar's predilection for Honey Nut Cheerios, this is gay domesticity pushed virtually to the level of parody. Does this narrative strategy signal an implicit acknowledgment by *The Wire*'s predominantly white creative team that they do not have the necessary background experience and knowledge to attempt such a comprehensive portrayal? Either way, the selective "discretion" of the much-vaunted realism of *The Wire* serves all the more to highlight those privileged moments of aesthetic contact with black male figures, when they are thrown into affective, cinematic relief and the viewer is actively encouraged to project.

The intertextual in-joke of Renaldo reading the 2005 crime novel *Drama City* by one of its writers, Georges Pelecanos, confirms that artistic self-reflexivity and knowledge in *The Wire* is linked directly to its elaboration of homoerotic desire. The brief glimpse of Deputy Commissioner Rawls in a predominantly black gay bar (a thread that most uncharacteristically for *The Wire* is never pursued) serves as a tacit recognition that the series is also addressing—and indeed catering to—forms of (white) gay fantasy. In a supremely indulgent moment of dramatic irony, Rawls will later quip disingenuously to his colleagues that he, like everyone else, is not adverse to a little perversion. While such consummate self-awareness on the part of its white characters (and creators) may not help to answer or cancel out some of the concerns I expressed at the beginning, nevertheless *The Wire* offers without doubt one of the most far-reaching formal explorations yet of the relations between race and spectatorial desire and opens up the possibility for new forms of gay realism both in television and film. The last shot of Michael stepping out of the darkness to rob Vinson and other dealers hints strongly that he may be a reincarnation of Omar—an exciting and tantalizing prospect.

‡ Cast listing of characters named in this essay (in the order they are mentioned): Omar Little (Michael Kenneth Williams), Detective Shakima "Kima" Greggs (Sonja Sohn), Detective Lester Freamon (Clarke Peters), Bubbles (Andre Royo), Officer Anthony Colicchio (Benjamin Busch), Detective William "Bunk" Moreland (Wendell Pierce), James "Jimmy" McNulty (Dominic West), Michael Lee (Tristan Wilds), Duquan "Dukie" Weems (Jermaine Crawford), Sergeant Ellis Carver (Seth Gilliam), Officer Thomas "Herc" Hauk (Domenick Lombardozzi), Johnny Weeks (Leo Fitzpatrick), Sherrod (Rashad Orange), Dennis "Cutty" Wise (Chad L. Coleman), Howard "Bunny" Colvin (Robert Wisdom), Joe "Proposition Joe" Stewart (Robert F. Chew), Roland "Prez" Pryzbylewski (Jim True-Frost), Marlo Stanfield (Jamie Hector), Sergeant Jay Landsman (Delaney Williams), Chris Partlow (Gbenga Akinnagbe), Felicia "Snoop" Pearson (Felicia Pearson), Brandon White (Michael Kevin Darnell), Wallace (Michael B. Jordan), Avon Barksdale (Wood Harris), Russell "Stringer" Bell (Idris Elba), Preston "Bodie" Broadus (J. D. Williams), D'Angelo Barksdale (Larry Gilliard, Jr.), Roland "Wee-Bey" Brice (Hassan Johnson), Detective Leander Sydnor (Corey Parker Robinson), Officer Kenneth Dozerman (Rick Otto), Former Mayor Clarence V. Royce (Glynn Turman), Police Commissioner Ervin H. Burrell (Frankie R. Faison), Brother Mouzone (Michael Potts), Donette (Shamyl Brown), Maurice "Maury" Levy (Michael Kostroff), Renaldo (Ramon Rodriguez), Butchie (S. Robert Morgan), Randy Wagstaff (Maestro Harrell), Colonel Cedric Daniels (Lance Reddick), Assistant State's Attorney Rhonda Pearlman (Deirdre Lovejoy), Cheryl (Melanie Nicholls-King), Deputy Commissioner for Operations William A. Rawls (John Doman), Vinson (Norris Davis).

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ABSTRACT This article argues that despite the omnipresence of homophobia relayed linguistically and thematically in *The Wire*, the show also includes some remarkable instances of male homoeroticism in the way it visualizes "cinematically" its black male characters. The result is a groundbreaking exploration of the relations between race, television realism, and spectatorship.

KEYWORDS *The Wire*, African American, masculinity, television realism, homoeroticism

THE WIRE FOR TOURISTS?

Who watches *The Wire*? It's a truism that HBO's sprawling five-season narrative of systemic dysfunction in Baltimore attracted fewer viewers—not to mention awards—than it deserved. That those whom it did attract often tended towards the evangelical did not always work in the show's favor; I know a number of people (I was one myself for a while) who responded to its reputation as "the best TV show ever made" by deferring rather than expediting access to a DVD boxed set, waiting for that mythical expanse of free—and receptive and alert—time when one could "do it justice."

Still, once inducted, it was easy to appreciate the compulsive appeal of the interwoven narratives and multilayered characters, and unsurprising to find a plethora of online exegetical forums and discussion boards—notably on HBO's own website (www.hbo.com/thewire)—where lines could be parsed, earlier scenes excavated, and predictions made and unmade while the series was still running about where it would all end. The Internet is ideal for the pursuit of such niche interests by small, informed, and emotionally invested groups of like-minded hobbyists, whose tone can turn on a dime from symposium-airy to lynch-mob-earthy. (In the case of *The Wire*, the latter was reliably provoked by the cavalier dissemination of plot spoilers by commenters who had seen episodes early, either on HBO's on-demand premium service or on pirate DVD.) Even after the close of the series, dedicated microsites like that hosted by the Guardian newspaper (guardian.co.uk/media/organgrinder+wire) provide a space for its fans to continue to discuss it.

In addition to the quality of its writing and performances, *The Wire* has also been widely hailed for its social realism, particularly the challenge its essential pessimism about the ability of entrenched institutions to effect change presents to the conspicuously efficacious individual dynamism that is conventional in Hollywood storytelling. Whether this in fact means that white, middle-class viewers of the show better understand the lives of black drug dealers and those living in the neighborhoods where they work is, however, arguable—and that argument can be found online. Ideas of race and class tourism are threaded through much of the web commentary on the series and its reception.

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On ebonyjet.com, the online presence of *Ebony* and *Jet* magazines, DeAngelo Starnes argues, writing about episode 52, that "the white audience is drawn to The Wire like white kids are to hip hop. They love that fantasy of Black thug life. They think they identify with it . . . For much of the audience, The Wire is like a zoo. Watch the animals in their limited habitat. Try to intellectualize where they're coming from. And then walk away feeling like you've been to an African jungle." Starnes goes on to credit David Simon, the creative motor of the show, with a deeper understanding of the environment he depicts—"you can't write what you see on The Wire from a zoo visit"—but similar suspicions from African American bloggers about audience motivation and response can be found elsewhere online. At diseducation.com, under the heading "Wire Lesson 2: Do We Trust White People?", Vasco B used three white characters from the show—police officers Hauk and McNulty and Mayor Carcetti—as case studies in how even ostensibly well-intentioned white people can exacerbate the problems of black people. Admitting to mixed feelings, Vasco suggested white acquaintances of his own, teachers and overseas voluntary workers, labored under similar delusions: "I feel slightly uncomfortable with the 'let's help the poor helpless people of color around the world' mentality usually found in affluent White students at Liberal Arts universities around the country. But I'm not sure why."

Posting at heavenandhere.wordpress.com, the blogger jetsetjunta seems to offer confirmation of these suspicions, mourning the show's passing because it will remove a fictional window on an unfamiliar section of society. "It's nice having this dependably screwy prism through which to refract our own conceptualizations of our society and culture. I guess I'll just have to read the papers." It's notable that the show is here conceived as equivalent to real-world reporting as a source of information about another America—especially as the fifth and final season of *The Wire* was largely concerned with the practice of journalism, and the consequences of newspapermen indulging readers' perceived appetite for sensational stories at the expense of accurate or even truthful reporting. The character Scott Templeton, a fictional reporter for the real *Baltimore Sun*, is seen over the season to be fabricating material for careerist purposes.

In the real world, there seems to be an appetite for confirmation that *The Wire* presents an "authentic" portrait of life in "the game," to use the show's term for the violent shadow

economy in which many of its characters function. In a *Washington Post* article from December 11, 2006, headlined "The Wire: Young Adults See Bits of Their Past" (available on www.washingtonpost.com), staff reporter Carol D. Leonnig spoke to African American college students who could supposedly judge the show's authenticity. Talking about the young characters at the narrative center of the show's fourth season, which focused on the educational system, one student told Leonnig "we know kids just like them in that situation," while another recalled a high-school classmate who dropped out to sell drugs and is "probably doing the same thing now." A third suggested that "even if an individual hasn't grown up in a low-income environment, they still can find some relation to 'The Wire' and its characters."

It's harder, however, to find much in the way of first-hand testimony from those who have grown up in the type of environment featured on *The Wire*, or even to garner much reliable evidence about how much popularity it enjoys among such demographic groups. Pirate DVDs of season 4 were found to be in circulation throughout the eastern seaboard ahead of its broadcast. Simon spoke vehemently about this piracy, and especially the uploading of spoilers, in an interview for aol.com: "any asshole, who, armed with a bootleg copy of a show, posts a clip of a major character being killed on YouTube or headlines a website posting with 'XXname hereXX R.I.P.' has pretty much defined himself before the world as a hopeless, useless premature ejaculator" (www.borderline-productions.com/TheWireHBO/exclusive4-2.html).

Perhaps the most interesting area where these concerns came into play was a blog (freakonomics.blogs.nytimes.com/tag/the-wire/), on the website of *The New York Times*. "What Do Real Thugs Think of The Wire?" was actually a subset of the *Freakonomics* blog, hosted by the *Times*, named after a study of unconventional, counterintuitive socio-economic subjects that reached the *Times* bestseller list. One of the authors of the book and blog, the Columbia sociologist Sudhir Venkatesh, has well-established links with gang members, and arranged to watch season 5 of *The Wire* with "a few respected street figures" in "the Harlem apartment of Shine, a 43-year-old half Dominican, half African-American man who managed a gang for fifteen years before heading to prison for a ten-year drug trafficking sentence." They were joined by several other former gang members in their thirties and forties, and twenty-nine-year-old Flavor, who was still "in the game." Over the two months of the blog's duration, Venkatesh reported opinions on which characters would prosper or die and the authenticity of the show's depiction of the drug trade, as well as subjects such as Barack Obama, police corruption, and chicken wings.

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

La Ronde on DVD

The reports elicited sometimes angry feedback. From the first entry, the blog was attracting posters who said they were Baltimore ex-cons ("get out the game count your losses and start a new," counselled Jay). At the same time, perhaps primed by season 5's anatomy of crooked reporting, some skeptics were soon declaring that "Venkatesh is the Scott Templeton of academia" and, like Templeton's on-screen editor, demanded more information about sources, even pictorial evidence. Less strident but more numerous were those who accused Venkatesh of "exoticizing poverty and perpetuating stereotypes . . . we need to begin to start criticizing this man for his racist, highly sensational totally fictionalized analysis of poor people or the message of the wire will be entirely lost upon society," wrote mg. The blog's coy censorship of racist epithets ("uppity [characters]" indeed) certainly placed its subjects at a distance, especially in contrast to *The Wire*'s own unabashed profanity. Some readers expressed alarm that other commenters were making little distinction between the fictional characters in the show and the real people in Venkatesh's reports, a concern that was exacerbated when Venkatesh himself confused the names of a character and a subject. Things got even more tangled when he reported that a gangland vendetta had forced Flavor into hiding. It was plain from the comments this provoked that certain fans of the blog—which by now had attracted a devoted following—were indeed getting vicarious thrills from reading about the lives of others.

The blog wound down prematurely and unexpectedly, when the 'Thugs' decided they were no longer interested: "we can walk out the door and see this stuff every day." Venkatesh also conjectured that "watching the show made them nervous" about Flavor, who remained in danger. They did, however, recount how interested they had been to read the blog feedback, which had afforded them an intriguing and thought-provoking outlook on the lives of a group with whom they had no day-to-day contact. "I don't talk to a lot of people outside my 'hood," one said, "For me, I got to learn about 'those' people"—that is, fans of *The Wire*.

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SOME LAST WORDS ON *THE WIRE*

As actor Wendell Pierce, who plays Detective "Bunk" Moreland, puts it during a bonus documentary in the fifth season boxed set of *The Wire*: the "moral ambiguity that [the program] explored in City Hall extends [this season] into the media, because whoever controls the media is the one that controls the power." Season 5, modeled on co-creator David Simon's twelve years as a reporter for the *Baltimore Sun*, explores this power and its abuses via the program's characteristic blurring of institutional fact and fiction (for instance, some of Simon's former colleagues, including Steven Luxenberg and Rebecca Corbett, appear in cameo roles in the newsroom scenes alongside actors playing fictional versions of themselves). One of the season's main storylines introduces fictional *Sun* City Editor Augustus "Gus" Haynes (Clark Johnson) while following the ethical and professional trajectories of several young reporters, including the unscrupulous Scott Templeton (Tom McCarthy). The paper's increasingly ineffectual management struggles with declining revenues and budgets, in turn forcing rounds of layoffs at the behest of distant proprietors. In his audio commentary and on the DVD documentaries, Simon argues that newspapers are increasingly out of touch with their own cities, especially when veteran staff are cut and those that remain are increasingly compelled to focus on sensationalistic tabloid material by ownership.

The documentary extra, "*The Wire*: The Last Word," provides valuable insight via the observations of journalists such as Luxenberg, Joe Klein, and Jacob Weisberg (in addition to Simon himself), who have found themselves being forced to do "more with less" (a phrase that recurs within the season). Waning readership translates to diminished profit margins, in turn leading to reduced staff and deteriorating capabilities for quality coverage. Luxenberg suggests that this downward spiral is a matter of simple economics: he argues, "Capital moves where capital can make the most of its money. So if the newspapers industry isn't going to make it capital, then those stockholders will take their money somewhere else." Simon bluntly states that the corporations which control these newspapers demonstrate "no responsibility, except to the bottom line, to the price per share. That's America." Arguing that journalists do not share this luxury, *Slate* editor-in-chief Weisberg points to the strain on individual reporters placed by more stringent contemporary ethical standards in response to recent scandals of journalistic fabrication. Interestingly, the deterioration of journalism is parsed by several of the commentators in "The Last Word" in military terms, with Klein arguing that the critical mass of reporters necessary for the proper function of the newsroom is slipping away "the more our forces are reduced," and Burns suggesting newspapers must create the perception of effective news coverage while having "insufficient grunts on the ground to really get the news." Though the Iraq War is referred to on several occasions in *The Wire*, it's arguably in this season, in which problems of exaggeration and misinformation are brought to the fore, that it is most relevant to the drama. (The DVD supplemental information reinforces this notion: when McNulty complains about his inability to generate new leads in a case, arguing that he "cannot make this shit up," Simon acknowledges in the commentary that the writers wanted here to put viewers in mind of the Bush administration.) It is the complaints of an outraged homeless Iraqi War veteran about Templeton's embellishing of an interview with him that prompt Haynes to start investigating the deceitful reporter.

Commenting on the newspaper's misplaced focus in the final episode, Simon declares: "The subtext was that while they were confounding themselves covering things that don't matter, or in the case of the fabricator, not real. They spend the entire ten episodes missing every story that was real." The critique of the news media does not emerge only in the extras and in the newsroom scenes themselves; it is also explored poignantly in relation to two of *The Wire*'s most enduring characters—the honorable outlaw Omar Little (Michael Kenneth Williams) and homeless drug addict Bubbles (Andre Royo). Both Omar and Bubbles are for the most part outside Baltimore's institutions, both civic and criminal. One interesting marker of their marginal status is that both men avoid profanity, the show's lingua franca—rather than curses, their dialogue is peppered with epigrammatic ruminations on the rules of the street and the law in Baltimore. Omar's name and exploits of robbing drug crews are often heard whispered by the corner boys; he becomes an increasingly mythological character this season. But despite his legendary status, his name never reaches the printed pages of the *Sun*. By contrast, Bubbles becomes the subject of a lengthy feature article by young reporter Mike Fletcher (Brandon Young), an incident which symbolizes his success-

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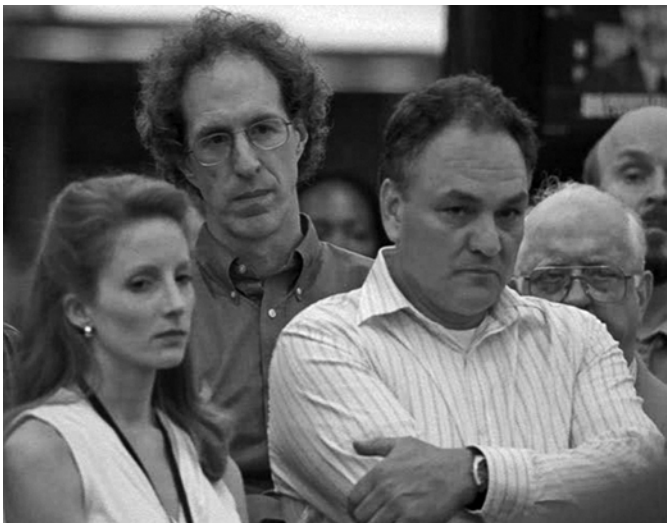

Reality meets fiction with a cameo by Steven Luxenburg (top, second left)

© 2008 Home Box Office. DVD: HBO Home Video.

ful rehabilitation from addiction. In relation to these characters, *The Wire* shows the way journalism can, on the one hand, bring benefit to people's lives and, on the other, miss the most important stories altogether.

Another supplementary film, "*The Wire* Odyssey," examines the series as a whole, exploring thematic threads across the arcs of each season and throughout the program's entire run, as well affording both the actors and production staff the opportunity to reflect on favorite moments and characters. Pierce discusses the memorable exchange in season 3 in which his character chastises Omar, lamenting that the neighborhood in which they both grew up was once a community; now it is "just bodies." Deirdre Lovejoy, who plays Assistant State's Attorney Rhonda Pearlman, recalls the infamous crime scene from the first season in which Bunk and McNulty communicate solely via variations of the word "fuck." Such reminisces clearly appeal to longtime devotees of the program, but also serve to highlight *The Wire*'s remarkable writing at both its most poignant and darkly playful. Also of note is the discussion by the actors of their auditions for the various characters, as they suggest quite dramatically different forms the program might have taken. For instance, Lance Reddick, cast as Cedric Daniels, initially tried out for the role of Bunk and then Bubbles—a part he would have been given had Royo not taken it. Similarly, Isaiah Whitlock, Jr., memorable as State Senator Clay Davis, tried out for the role of Lester Freamon, as did Reg E. Cathey (cast as mayoral aide Norman Wilson), who also read for the part of Daniels. Imagining any of these exceptional actors in any other than the roles that they singularly mastered and defined is difficult at best—further testament to the show's expert casting, production, and execution. (There is an amusing variation on the what-might-have-been scenario: Delaney Williams, who plays Detective Jay Landsman, relates that the real former Baltimore Police Department employee Jay Landsman auditioned for the role of his character, "but they ended up having to let him go because he wasn't a good enough Jay Landsman. I'm sure he takes exception to that.")

Unlike previous seasons of *The Wire*, which were allocated either twelve- or thirteen-episode arcs, the final season was given only ten episodes by HBO (who, according to Simon, originally asked the show be wrapped up in only eight episodes, playing what he called "a zero-sum game in terms of production dollars"—a clear reference to HBO's backing of the program in spite of its perennially low audience share and lamentable inability to reach a wider commercial audience). As such, the dramatic arcs and characters of the final season feel a bit unnaturally compressed at times and Ed Burns notes in commentary that certain characters were shortchanged: "Some of the subtleties that the extra two or three episodes would have given us were sort of stripped away." (Simon adds that "there wasn't enough room" to give many of the actors the scenes their characters deserve.) Though it is interesting to speculate about what might have been, in the end HBO's remarkable sustained support of the program through five seasons is noteworthy in an age of network programming in which critically lauded yet "under-performing" shows sometimes fail to make it through a single season. It is hard to believe that any other network would have allowed *The Wire* the time and financing to succeed on its own terms as an incomparably complex dramatic interrogation of urban life in contemporary America.

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DVD DATA *The Wire: The Complete Fifth Season*. Various directors. © 2008 Home Box Office Inc. Publisher: HBO Video, 2008. $59.99, 4 discs.

MANUFACTURED LANDSCAPES

Jennifer Baichwal's 2006 documentary *Manufactured Landscapes* is an essayistic meditation upon Edward Burtynsky's large-scale color photographs of China's rampant industrialization and its environmental impact. The particular China series that gives the film its title is the result of several expeditions to that country, the last of which, in 2005, included Baichwal and her crew. Burtynsky's photographs have appeared in book form and in magazines and been widely exhibited in galleries. Footage from a 2005 show at the Brooklyn Museum is featured at several key moments in Baichwal's documentary, which premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival in 2006. The film has since been released in fifteen different countries, recently in the United States; DVD editions are also numerous, the latest of which is published by the British Film Institute. In a telephone interview with me (September 12, 2008), Baichwal emphasized that her film's focus is the photographs themselves, rather than on the artist or his politics.

Because Burtynsky systematically aestheticizes industrial civilization's environmental incursions, his images are marked with an almost insentient detachment and lack of critical positioning that can be troubling. But, as Baichwal explained to me, what she finds provocative in Burtynsky's work is this very same ambiguity and lack of didacticism, which leads to the experiential "horror" of encountering the "detritus of our existence" in what initially appears to be abstract painting. Baichwal and her collaborators took Burtynsky's frames as their starting point, but ultimately determined to "do what [the images] could not do, which was to follow the narratives that exist in all the photographs and be able to focus on the detail that makes up that picture," the detail of human lives. Rows of workers laboring in sprawling factories, for example, are "subsumed by the machines" that dominate Burtynsky's characteristic long-shot photographs. The people in these images are there only to "remind us of their insignificance." Indeed, this is Burtynsky's point: by rendering people almost as abstract figures, he emphasizes the dehumanizing dimensions of industrialization. His technique renders the images both effective and, as Baichwal put it, "problematic." The project of her documentary is therefore one of "honoring the individual," which, in formal terms, entails showing the "back and forth" between, on the one hand, Burtynsky's overwhelming abstraction and, on the other, the "innumerable small parts" and "teeming organic life" that also constitute China and its images.

Baichwal credits Burtynsky as one of the film's authors. The interviews with cinematographer Peter Mettler, Baichwal, and Burtynsky featured as extras on this BFI edition further emphasize the collaborative nature of the project of "translating" Burtynsky's photographs in such a way as to "intelligently convey a still medium in a time-based medium"—and so to create what Baichwal called an "extension" of Burtynsky's depictions. As this term suggests, what is at stake in the film is a respectful study of the work, but one which has its own aesthetic sensibility and political agenda. In particular, by substantiating the flatness of the original photographs, extending them with the insertion of humanizing narratives, the film systematically reverses Burtynsky's strategic neutrality. Frequent use is made of close-ups, for example, minimizing Burtynsky's high and distanced vantage points. Consistent with the "back and forth" methodology, the camera repeatedly zooms in on and then pulls back from Burtynsky's photographs: the moving image dissolves into the original still. An extended lateral tracking shot of a factory's sprawling production floor, for example, is suddenly rendered static as it seemingly melds into an image that has already been framed by Burtynsky. In this way, Baichwal uses basic cinematic means to reorient the viewer's perception of the photographs. Mettler's slow, roaming camerawork, most notable in several mobile long takes, emphasizes the difference between photography's stasis and cinema's motion. What Baichwal calls Mettler's "organic" style of shooting contributes to the sense that the viewer's perspective is that of an active observer rather than a detached spectator.

The soundtrack also provides elements of interpretation. The use of ambient music composed by Dan Driscoll provides a subtle yet distinct means of guidance and persuasion, while interviews with Chinese workers, factory officials, and entrepreneurs are also used strategically to emphasize the political implication of Burtynsky's work, namely the understanding that industrialization occurs in conjunction with social imbalance and injustice. Further supplementation occurs by means of a voice track comprised of Burtynsky's own com-

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Industrial artifacts

Courtesy BFI.

mentary. Though they are kept to a minimum, Burtynsky's words are essential. Take for example a defining moment of epiphany that occurs midway, wherein Burtynsky explains his realization that his medium and therefore his environmentally committed projects are complicit with the very systems he is attempting to expose. Because photography is an industrial practice, Burtynsky's photographs (and Baichwal's film) cannot document the ills of industry's expansion without being implicated within the same profligate circuitry. From film stock's use of mined silver in its nitrate compound to the fuel his vehicles burn as he scouts for locations, every aspect of Burtynsky's photography is derived from the same harmful processes he is determined to bring to society's attention.

However, the film's few sequences that depict Burtynsky as he is shooting add to this a notable layer of complication. Though Burtynsky has lately embraced certain methods of digital imaging, his preference is for an almost archaic mode of photography. In order to obtain his expansive prints Burtynsky uses a cumbersome 8x10 large-format "bellows" camera. Because large-format film stock is so light-sensitive, Burtynsky has to use a tripod to stabilize the camera; a black focusing cloth is also necessary (to darken the image reflected on the camera's exposed ground glass plate while the practitioner adjusts focus). The symbolic logic of this artistic practice—the artist stooped beneath the black shroud, finger poised on the cable release button, faithful to an old-fashioned mode of photography—suggests a defiance of the reckless forward momentum of industrialization.

Baichwal's film was originally shot on Super 16mm film, but it also includes portions of black-and-white archival footage amassed during Burtynsky's previous expeditions to China as well as to Bangladesh. *Manufactured Landscapes* additionally includes footage from Burtynsky's acceptance of the 2005 TED Prize, still snapshots by Mettler, Burtynsky's aerial footage of California freeways, and the exhibited photographs themselves; Baichwal understandably regards documentary as a "mongrel-like activity." The documentary form, she told me, "has to take from everything," all relevant sources, irrespective of a filmmaker's aesthetic or philosophical preferences for a given medium. Baichwal herself admits to having a strong bias towards celluloid cinema: "film is reality," says Baichwal, "and video is a record of that reality." These sentiments reflect Burtynsky's own views, and so photographer and filmmaker share a fundamental sensitivity to the aesthetic and even ontological nuances involved in translating between media. The "Stills Gallery" on this DVD features a wide selection of Burtynsky's images, each frame accompanied by his voiceover commentary which emphasizes the artist's knowledge of environmental issues, but also his reputation for fastidious attention to aesthetic and then technological detail. He often shoots a subject 200 times, alternating between three or four stocks, and then prints on different types of paper before settling on an ideal image. In light of this, did Burtynsky not regard the submission of his images first to the cinematic medium and then to digital form as an artistic compromise? Baichwal explained that

China transforming

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during the process of converting the original 16mm footage to HD in order to digitize for editing, Burtynsky collaborated on the color-correcting of his images. Though they both agreed that the film was not a "substitute for the photographs," they still spent an hour on each picture, she said, before being satisfied of fidelity to the original. Burtynsky recognizes that some amount of digital conversion must be involved if he is to effectively promote his work. Indeed, as Baichwal explained, asked on the occasion of the TED Prize award what wishes he would like fulfilled, he said he would

like "to use his photographs to awaken environmental consciousness in a more mass media way. He is not precious about the aesthetic qualities of the images when they are disseminated or reproduced. He is practical about that."

Baichwal uses her film to foreground the "uncomfortable" position of ambivalence that Burtynsky's detached images instill in his audience. "Let the viewer decide," Burtynsky comments throughout *Manufactured Landscapes*, a film which is, Baichwal similarly argued as we spoke, "so meditative and slow it forces the viewer to live with [her/his] own thoughts." The poeticism and commitment to even-handedness that characterize Baichwal's film radically differ from more polemical environmental documentaries which might be held up as comparisons. Baichwal herself cites *An Inconvenient Truth* (also released in 2006) as the direct opposite of *Manufactured Landscapes*, not necessarily in terms of its accomplishments, but for the rhetorical voice—didactic versus detached—that each one possesses. But, Baichwal concedes, though Davis Guggenheim's portrayal of Al Gore's environmental activism is formally "conventional" and "essentially the presentation of a slide show" it remains powerful "because of Al Gore's passion for what he is talking about." More fundamentally, Guggenheim's film is decisive in its arguments while Burtynsky's images and *Manufactured Landscapes* fall within the mode of "unresolvable" artistic expression. "There is something about exploring these issues and the human condition in the arena of art that is interesting to me because it is un-paraphrasable." For Baichwal "art is capable of moving you intellectually and emotionally at the same time. You have to live with ambiguity and complexity."

This discursive tension between poetry and documentary argument has direct bearing on the content of Burtynsky's (and now Baichwal's) representation of environmental subjects. The director's preparatory research into environmental politics and landscape photography enabled her to situate Burtynsky within a larger "conversation about sustainability and ecology and the environmental movement that began in the 60s and 70s" but that "petered out in the 80s because [its methods] were strident, didactic." As she engaged with Burtynsky's work through the lens of ecological inquiry and activism she asked how it was that "those [earlier] arguments did not capture the imaginations of people," whereas Burtynsky's images seem to "shift consciousness in a non-didactic way." This directly impacts how we might intellectually grapple with the complexities of the globe's environmental perils. "There are no easy solutions or resolutions, which is exactly the state that we are in ecologically and environmentally. If there was an easy solution we would have figured it out." So, "we have to live with the uncomfortable ambiguity of our own role and also our inability to figure out a way to get out of it. There are so many gestures you could make towards making things better, but there is no one panacea that is going to solve it all." Just like art, from painting to photography to filmmaking, human relations with the natural world are necessarily perplexing.

Ultimately, what *Manufactured Landscapes* "extends" is not only Burtynsky's distinctive images of the transforming planet, but also, fundamentally, his audience. "It is very rare," Baichwal said, "for a film to sell in [such a large] number of territories. We had no idea that it would strike a cord like it did." Notably, Baichwal mentions (in a BFI Southbank talk included on this DVD) that though the film is not officially distributed in China, it circulates widely in bootleg form. A further dimension of audience relations is that in the two years since *Manufactured Landscapes* premiered, China's economic might, consumer scares, and more evidential erosion of the natural world have incited hysteria over this country's ecological, social, and industrial transgressions. Baichwal admits to having once been concerned that the film might be perceived as a symptom of reactionary public sentiment. Yet the film's meditative quality, as well as the irresolvable nature of its images, does not allow it to be read as an expression of "Chinese panic." The compelling sequences that juxtapose Shanghai's traditional *longtang* neighborhoods against imposing modern developments convey Baichwal's disturbed response to China's deepening social discrepancies.

The Shanghai housing sequences conclude with footage of a gallery opening of Burtynsky's work. As Baichwal's frame performs a final pull-back, we realize what we thought was a first-person pan of the Shanghai skyline is really a close-up scan of a photograph. As patrons mill about contemplating the portraits, we are confronted with the film's most essential juxtaposition: here is the exclusive venue and privileged audience that receives Burtynsky's images of China and then interprets its impact on the globe's ecological health. By ending here Baichwal unequivocally identifies us, the audience, as participants in and benefactors of this insidious cycle of unsustainable development; not only do we consume China via its ubiquitous exports, but also through the very images that represent and thus "manufacture" this country.

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DVD DATA *Manufactured Landscapes*. Director: Jennifer Baichwal. © 2006 2064257 Ontario Inc. / National Film Board of Canada. Publisher: BFI, 2008. £19.99, 1 disc.

ABOUT CHINESE CINEMA

RICHARD JOHN ASCARATE

When K'ang-hsi, third son of Shun-chih and second emperor of the Ch'ing dynasty, ascended the throne in 1661 at the tender age of seven, he already faced formidable challenges, not the least of which was to unite several politically, culturally, and linguistically diverse provinces into a stable empire. After waging an eight-year civil war that lasted until 1681, the young emperor and his generals subdued the rebellious Three Feudatories, thereby joining regions of China that extended from the province of Sichuan to the East China Sea. K'ang-hsi then captured Taiwan and established an island garrison there, manning it with several thousand troops. To assuage the feelings of Ming scholars, whose dynasty he had defeated in the process, he graciously set them to work writing their own history. To consolidate and reform the written language, the aging but indefatigable ruler ordered a definitive Chinese dictionary be compiled, meanwhile dabbling with western technology and musical instruments (the harpsichord) brought him by the Jesuits. Ah, *plus ça change* . . .

Today, manufacturers and consumers of Chinese cinema confront some of the same issues as those that challenged Emperor K'ang-hsi three and a half centuries ago. Which nation, for example, does the adjective denote in "Chinese cinema": mainland China, Hong Kong, or Taiwan? Which tongue gives it voice, Mandarin of Beijing (where fricatives whir) or that of Taipei (whose sibilants hiss), or one of a myriad of Chinese dialects, such as Wu, Hunan, Jiangxi, Kejia, and Yue (not to forget Cantonese and Taiwanese)? And as globalization diffuses throughout the world, how many western plots and visual devices can "Chinese cinema"—whatever that may be—abide and still retain a semblance of national identity? (Asia's long history of shadow plays aside, cinema is a western invention.) Scholars have recently written a number of fine studies to address these and many other questions, opening the curtain further on a cinema whose depth, history, and sophistication have yet to receive their due among English-speaking audiences.

Indeed, western fans carried aloft by the airy visuals of Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000) may not be aware how much the film owes to King Hu's *A Touch of Zen* (1975). But the features of the descendant are to be seen in the forebear: flashy swordplay, impossible romance, bamboo fisticuffs, even acrobatic chases afoot that shift asymptotically from the horizontal to the vertical (and in the days before sophisticated software programs, trampoline- rather than computer-assisted). Though seldom screened today and overshadowed in revival theaters and on cable television by the Bruce Lee films which were its contemporaries, *A Touch of Zen*, Stephen Teo notes, was the first Chinese-language film to win a prize at Cannes and the first of the *wuxia*—or martial chivalry—genre to do the same at an international film festival. Oddly, no major study of *A Touch of Zen* has been written.

Teo redresses this generational neglect with a volume at once sophisticated and—though based on a doctoral thesis—accessible. He argues that King Hu's film resonates to this day in part because of the director's subversive portrait of the pugilistic female protagonist, Yang Huizhen (Xu Feng), and her relationship with the sexually ambivalent, maternally harassed male lead, Gu Shengzai (Shi Jun). The author suggests that *A Touch of Zen* sets itself apart from other martial arts films in propounding a philosophical–religious view of action (this is not, after all, *Fists of Fury* or *Drunken Master*).

The author first contextualizes his subject by tracing Hu's difficult and unhappy career with the Shaw Brothers studio, a one-time factory for kung fu films where harried directors were frequently given less than a week to crank out a movie. He then follows Hu to Taiwan, where the director fled to give his muse greater latitude and build the Union studio, home of his masterpieces, *Dragon Inn* (1967) and *A Touch of Zen*. Once textual analysis proper begins, Teo—like some cinematic *wuxia* artist—draws upon a dazzling array of theoretical props to achieve his ends: the writings of Freud,

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Benjamin, Jung, Kristeva, and Todorov from the west; from the east, those of Confucius, Buddha, and Lao Tse, along with their western disciples and interpreters, Eugen Herrigel and Alan Watts.

Able to expound upon overarching themes and visual leitmotifs, the author also draws attention to the most minute and mundane details—the Barthean *puncta*—in a frame. So thoroughly does Teo tease out the significance of visual and literary allusions that those who follow will find little left to do. For example, Hu based the screenplay of *A Touch of Zen* on a ghost story in *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*, an anthology by Pu Songling (1640–1715). Teo discerns the importance of this source to the director by the unusual placement of the seventeenth-century work's title in the opening credits, immediately after the production company logo. He shows how calligraphy on Gu's wall signifies the film's didacticism, establishes the scholar's character, and suggests the story's outcome. The author argues that Hu's work is an essential film of Chinese-language cinema. Likewise, Teo has written an essential monograph of Chinese cinema studies, setting a standard for scholarship of any film genre or national cinema.

Gary Xu begins *Sinascape* observing that western news media increasingly refer to the beginning of this millennium as "China's century" (1). The nation's hosting of the Olympics, numerous and massive domestic building projects, and growing transcontinental business ventures make the assertion difficult to gainsay. Xu will have none of it. He claims that the *effect* of China's international rise has less to do with the rise itself than with the ways in which different political and ideological agendas manipulate the *representations* of that rise. (Hapless citizens of certain African and Latin American countries whose rickety economies and repressive regimes China has lately propped up in its quest for a place in the sun may beg to differ.) And representations, as any student of semiotics knows, can sustain multiple interpretations.

As Xu explains, the neologism in the title refers to a complex, China-centered network of transnational film production and consumption, wherein images and ideologies clash, resist globalization, and make possible visual innovations and progressive visions. Using the theoretical framework of "sinascape," he demonstrates how Chinese cinema has been inflected by six elements, the proliferating copyright industry, modernization's relentless urban demolition, and masculinist history's erasure of individual memories among them.

Xu's introductory remarks can become a bit labored. But once through the beaded curtain of academic discourse, the author in six chapters cleverly analyzes blockbusters such as Zhang Yimou's *Hero* (2002), as well as other works more familiar to art house habitués, using textual, historical, and aesthetic methods. He adds a touch of political critique to peel back layers from the visuals and promote a deeper appreciation of the various issues at stake in each work.

For example, Xu argues, Stephen Chow's *Kung Fu Hustle*—which opened to rave reviews in the United States in April 2005 and remains the highest-grossing Chinese film in China—is a maverick among martial arts films because the director mocks everything the genre holds culturally and cinematically authentic. Xu notes that although American critics consider Chow's film "lowbrow" because of its many pop-culture references (surely betraying a western chauvinism, for the Monty Python crew is credited with comedic genius for doing much the same), *Kung Fu Hustle* stands at the end of a long and respected Chinese martial arts cinematic tradition. On the surface, Chow looks, dresses, and moves like Bruce Lee, but the actor–director pays deeper respects to the Shaw Brothers studio in casting Dong Zhihua as the fighting baker, Doughnut.

Specifically, Dong was the favorite actor of Chang Cheh, one of the Shaws' most prolific and creative martial arts directors. Further, the main action in the film takes place in fetid Pigsty Alley. Where western audiences may see only a neighborhood of such squalor that even violent and rapacious gangs do not encroach, Chinese audiences of Chow's generation

BOOK DATA

King Hu's A Touch of Zen by Stephen Teo. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2007. $17.95 paper. 179 pages.

Sinascape: Contemporary Chinese Cinema by Gary G. Xu. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007. $76.00 cloth; $26.95 paper. 175 pages.

China on Screen: Cinema and Nation by Chris Berry and Mary Farquhar. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006. $73.00 cloth; $28.50 paper. 313 pages.

Reinventing China: A Generation and Its Films by Paul Clark. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2005. $39.00 cloth; $20.00 paper. 257 pages.

Taiwan Film Directors: A Treasure Island by Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh and Darrell William Davis. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005. $75.00 cloth; $28.00 paper. 296 pages.

Cinema Taiwan: Politics, Popularity and State of the Arts, ed. Darrell William Davis and Ru-shou Robert Chen. New York: Routledge, 2007. $170.00 cloth; $39.95 paper. 236 pages.

will recognize a setting from their cinematic past and a subtle critique of China's political and economic modernization.

That is, Chow borrowed Pigsty Alley from a 1973 Shaw Brothers film, *The House of Seventy-Two Tenants* (Chor Yuen), which beat Bruce Lee's *Enter the Dragon* at the Hong Kong box office that year (and began a revival of Cantonese-language films when Mandarin predominated). The director, Chor, based his film in turn upon another of the same name produced in Mainland China ten years earlier. Both versions took inspiration from a popular Shanghai play of the 1940s that satirized the (then) Nationalist government. Xu thereby performs a deft act of triangulation by arguing that crooked police, dishonest city bureaucrats, and the lawless Axe Gang of Chow's film—based on corrupt firemen in *The House of Seventy-Two Tenants*—may subtly refer to contemporary Chinese politicians, who—as the western press has lately reported—intimidate, evict, and demolish anyone or anything in their path to effect economic goals.

In *China on Screen: Cinema and Nation*, Chris Berry and Mary Farquhar propose that the national cinemas approach of analyzing films be replaced by a larger framework of cinema and the national. They place Benedict Anderson's concept of the nation as a problematic construction, a constantly shifting fabrication that may be challenged, at the center of their argument about national identity in cinema. Their interest lies in how discursive techniques imported from non-Chinese cinema affect and are affected by local narrative tropes and patterns, thus creating spaces for Chinese national identities to emerge and contend. Eight chapters examine a variety of weighty topics.

The second chapter, for instance, discusses time and the national in cinema, which Berry and Farquhar divide in three ways: first, whereby national history films of the modern nation-state produce linear, progressive, and logical time (e.g., Li Quanxi's and Xie Jin's versions of *The Opium War*, 1963 and 1997 respectively); second, whereby films look back critically at the projects of the modern nation state (e.g., Hou Hsaio-hsien's *City of Sadness*, 1989); and third, whereby films express a yearning for pasts before modernity, which engage in haunted time (e.g., Wong Kar-wai's *In the Mood for Love*, 2000).

Another two chapters examine what the authors describe as Chinese cinematic modes, or categories of resemblance much broader than those traditionally ascribed to individual films, genres, periods, and territories. One such mode includes the operatic, as seen in classical opera films from the early 1900s—which, the authors contend, represent visual statements of cultural nationalism—and extending to the acrobatic antics of erstwhile Peking Opera School pupil Jackie Chan. Another mode, the realist, consists of those films intimately connected to modernity and nation-building (i.e., time and national in cinema), exemplified by Chen Kaige's famous *Yellow Earth* (1984).

A further chapter argues that one can better understand the dominant images of Chinese women in cinema by relating them to different configurations of modernity and the nation state. Here, Berry and Farquhar examine three aspects of a woman's look: before the camera, before others, and her own subjective look. The authors give equal time to the question of masculinity and what they call "ordering the nation" (i.e., the social hierarchy prevailing therein). Premodern Confucian legal codes, which privileged masculinity in public and private spheres and were respected and followed for centuries, no longer carry as much sway, or at the least are undergoing rehabilitation. How, then, does cinema suggest a man should act? Like the patricidal Jet Li in *Hero*, the adolescent Jackie Chan in *Drunken Master* (Yuen Woping, 1978), or the ultra-violent Chow Yun-fat in *The Killer* (John Woo, 1989)? Final chapters examine the circulation of cinematic signs of ethnicity—or cultural and linguistic "otherness"—and the transnational, asking what price Chinese cinema has paid for its export success.

Readers are advised that the authors assume some familiarity with Chinese political and cultural history. Nevertheless, the book's strength is its structural clarity. Digests of coming discussions precede every chapter, even some subchapters. Berry and Farquhar do a balanced job of covering contemporary scholarship on the issues at hand and provide close readings to support their points. "Sidebars" give actor biographies and film synopses, while an appendix contains a handy chronology of Chinese film history.

Scholastically rigorous but touchingly intimate, Paul Clark's *Reinventing China: A Generation and Its Films* offers of all the books in this review the most historically insightful readings of some mainland Chinese films and their makers. The author focuses on fifth generation directors, those who graduated from the Beijing Film Academy in 1982 and did what Clark regards as their best work during a time of cultural liberation before the Tiananmen Square massacre of June 4, 1989. Clark explores the lives and works—in a kind of collective biography as he toggles among their stories—of ten filmmakers, among themWu Ziniu, Hu Mei, Liu Miaomiao, Zhang Jianya, Jiang Haiyang, and Zhang Yimou. He has known many of them for over two decades, long before their names graced marquees the world over.

This familiarity brightens every page. A thorough chronicler, Clark follows his subjects from childhood to the time they entered the Academy in 1978, their four years of study, and their careers after graduation until 1990. With Tolstoian

sweep, he recounts the grand scale of historical and political events in China—the founding of the People's Republic in 1949, the Maoist excesses of the Cultural Revolution in the 1970s, the economic reforms of Deng Xiaoping after 1978—as well as, in sometimes heartbreaking detail, how these events scarred the lives and psyches of the directors and their families and became manifest in the fifth generation's films. The result reads like a well-researched novel, one that few other film scholars could have written. Film school graduates struggling to finance their nascent masterpieces by hustling tables in Hollywood or New York may take encouragement from many of the tales here told.

Once upon a time in China not only the sins of the fathers but also those of more distant relatives were visited upon the sons. Thus was a teenage Zhang Yimou sent down to a people's commune in Guanzhong. There, the rusticated youth was forced to perform back-breaking labor—planting fields, spreading human and animal waste, digging irrigation ditches—because a paternal uncle had fled to Taiwan in 1948. After spending three years in rural obscurity, he was transferred to the relative sophistication of work in a cotton mill. Zhang soon drew attention to himself through his skills in drawing, calligraphy, and photography. Art still proved a cruel mistress. To purchase his first camera, Zhang sold his blood a half-liter at a time. He had to teach himself shot composition and film development, finally securing a place as a cinematography student in the Beijing Film Academy at the advanced age of twenty-eight, the oldest member of his class. *Judou* (1989), made only five years after Zhang graduated, was nominated for an Academy Award. China banned the film.

Clark states that he gleaned most of his information from interviews and informal reactions, without a tape recorder, in notes both Chinese and English. He discloses with Boswellian candor that he might have missed some details. Given what he has included, he may be forgiven. What would any film scholar not give to have been in a certain Guizhou-style restaurant in Beijing in July 1999, at table with Clark, Zhang Yimou, and Zhang Ziyi when the author judged—perhaps from one of life's cinematic elements: a furtive glance, an ambiguous word, a lingering touch—that the actress had become the director's new muse?

On the other side of the Taiwan Strait, Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh and Darrell William Davis focus their study on directors Edward Yang, Hou Hsiao-hsien, Ang Lee, and Tsai Ming-liang. Their criteria for selecting material to include in the volume are curious but reasonable, exhibiting a touch of Zen humor: directors discussed are—for the authors—the most intriguing and innovative that Taiwan film culture has to offer, but films examined are only those that are commercially available (quite a relief for the many without access to overseas film archives). Yeh and Davis do not claim exhaustiveness but make up for any perceived lack with thorough textual analyses of their chosen films.

The book consists of six loosely related chapters, self-contained essays really. The authors begin with a history of postcolonial Taiwanese cinema and its major directors, tracing three parallel tracks in their films: linguistic (i.e., Mandarin, the language in which films had to be made or dubbed to appeal to post-1945 mainland transplants and refugees, or Taiwanese—*taiyu pian*—for southern indigenous audiences); type (highly commercial Hong Kong distractions or edifying propaganda and nation-building films); and studio scale (large and Mandarin or small to mid-size and Taiwanese). They follow the expansion of Taiwan cinema through the late 1970s, after which Communist revolutions in Southeast Asia and the body blows of Hong Kong kung fu films and VCRs took their toll on its popularity. They relate well the birth, rise, and fall of Taiwan New Cinema during the 1980s and its divergence from healthy realism of the 1960s (an unlikely mix of romantic melodrama and civic virtue), commercial studio genres, and provincial Taiwanese-language films. Thereafter follow close studies of each of the four directors, perhaps the most intriguing being that of the controversial Tsai Ming-liang.

Yeh and Davis examine Tsai's use of camp, his questioning of the distinctions between family life and romance, and the meanings encapsulated in the word, *song*, a Taiwanese epithet that connotes working-class, peasant behavior. This and some observations about the metamorphosis of Confucian family relations in modern dramas serve as preamble to an analysis of Tsai's *The River* (1997), wherein a son cures himself of chronic physical pain (having found no relief from physicians, Chinese medicine, acupuncture, folk doctors, and shamans) through anonymous bathhouse sex with his father. The authors' classification of these doings as camp at least (for some, at most) withstands academic scrutiny. Few may regret, however, that Yeh and Davis did not also have an opportunity in this volume to consider Tsai's *The Wayward Cloud* (2005), which features an extended and graphic sequence of possible necrophilia and caused some outraged female spectators to walk out of early screenings, the camp elements of the mise-en-scène apparently having eluded them.

The authors disclose in a postscript that the time of their quartet of directors has passed; they no longer represent Taiwan cinema. The future—if such there be—lies with the island's aborigines, who alone can faithfully recount three centuries of colonization and abuse by Europeans, Chinese, and Japanese.

These findings somewhat echo those of the fourteen contributors to *Cinema Taiwan: Politics, Popularity and State of the Arts*, edited by Ru-shou Robert Chen and the seemingly ubiquitous Darrell William Davis. The editors begin by acknowledging that Taiwanese films have generated negligible box office receipts, even domestically, for several years. Certainly, between 1983 and 1993, the golden age of Taiwan New Cinema, local film culture thrived, acquiring political cachet by challenging state power and its hold on cultural production. (Comparing the suggestively similar ontogenies of Taiwan New Cinema and New German Cinema—both of which arose after aesthetically vacuous years of government-sponsored cinematic pabulum and crises over national identity and political direction—may someday prove profitable for a scholar of sufficient linguistic gifts and analytic ability.)

Like Berry and Farquhar, Davis and Chen and their contributors jettison the national cinemas approach, choosing instead to examine film through a lens they call "Cinema Taiwan," a fluid, flexible, heterogeneous, multicultural model that encompasses alternative voices, film forms, and storytelling modes while acknowledging the influence of market forces and cosmopolitanism. The editors divide the essays according to the three categories of the title. The offerings are nothing if not diverse.

Under "politics," Robert Chi looks at the combination of political issues and aesthetic strategies in several Mainland Chinese films that depict but have never been widely seen in Taiwan. Under "popularity," Hsiao-hung Chang takes a theoretically charged linguistic turn to unveil the difference between *wuxia* "flight" and kung fu "fight" as well as to question the underlying reasons for the current worldwide martial arts craze. The last of these categories, "state of the arts," refers to key aesthetic decisions of filmmakers as determined by critical analysis. Peter Rist, for example, nods to Barry Salt with his own examination of average shot length (ASL) in King Hu's *Come Drink With Me* (1965–66), arguing that the director's comparatively short ASLs, complex editing rhythms, and camera movements ushered in a new wave of Hong Kong *wuxia* films and changed Chinese-language films henceforward. Yung Hao Liu painstakingly analyzes the opening titles, frame-by-frame, of Tsai Ming-liang's *Goodbye Dragon Inn* (2003). She unpacks a deceptively simple visual wherein the spectator sees the back of the director's head as he, in turn, plays a spectator watching King Hu's *Dragon Inn*, not only inscribing a kind of Hitchcock signature but inviting one into his film and fusing classical cinema with cinema-in-the-making.

All six of the volumes reviewed here offer sturdy and original arguments, leaving the reader/spectator with much to contemplate, perhaps even to reconsider. If the collective possesses any weakness it is one shared by current cinema studies in general. In these postmodern days of global interconnectivity via digital communication, isolating the subtle and largely unassayable influence of flickering images on conceptions of national identity, gender patterns, and political ideology becomes less and less tenable (as does, of course, the obverse task of locating the influence of the several upon the one). Without respite, television, computer games, DVDs, Blackberries, and the Internet all deliver images whose denotations, connotations, and interpretations multiply daily beyond reckoning and disentanglement.

Although Yeh and Davis do mention in passing the growing number of television series, many of them high quality, high entertainment-value costume dramas set in ancient dynasties (such as K'ang-hsi's) and based on popular literature, neither they nor any of the other authors expand upon the subject. A pity, for series such as the South Korean *Jewel in the Palace* (2003), and the Chinese–Taiwanese coproduction, *Princess Pearl* (1998–99, 2003), are probably better known throughout Asia than any of Zhang Yimou's or Jackie Chan's films, thanks to passionate and dedicated bloggers, mass-marketed soundtracks, and imitators. They—along with the "idol" series, *Meteor Garden I* and *II* (2001, 2002), featuring the enormously successful Taiwanese pop group, F4—also offer comparable substance for analysis and discovery, employing many of the same plots, tropes, and devices as cinema. Still, even scholars, like rulers of nation states, must somewhere establish the limits of their dominions.

Emperor, warrior, and promoter of arts and sciences, K'ang-hsi may be best known outside of the Middle Kingdom for having orchestrated the Manchu Han Feast, a conciliatory gesture of over three hundred exotic dishes from throughout imperial China. Held over three days, the gourmet's and gourmand's dream brought to the same table mutually antagonistic Manchus and Hans. For a time, participants laid aside cultural, political, and historical differences to ponder and savor new flavors, fragrances, and images. The recent studies on contemporary Chinese cinema reviewed here represent a kind of contemporary, intellectual counterpart to K'ang-hsi's banquet. Scholars, students, and fans of diverse persuasions and tastes may approach and indulge, fully confident that their thoughts will be cultivated, their spirits regaled, and their expectations more than satisfied.

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JOHN BELTON

Frank Borzage: The Life and Films of a Hollywood Romantic by Herve Dumont

Herve Dumont's book on Frank Borzage, published in a lavishly illustrated edition in French in 1993, was an attempt to rescue the director from the oblivion into which he had fallen after his death in 1962. It did so—in Europe, at least, winning the Prix Simone Genevois book award. Now two more friends of the forgotten artist have lent themselves to the cause. Borzage's widow, Mrs. Juanita Moss, financed an English translation of Dumont's book and Martin Scorsese, a passionate admirer of the director's work, has written a foreword, providing McFarland with a celebrity endorsement to use in marketing the book (Scorsese's name appears on the cover, just below Dumont's).

Why should anyone be interested in Borzage? Not because he won the first Academy Award for Best Director (*Seventh Heaven*, 1927), but because he was one the great poets of the silent cinema and directed two dozen of the most powerful sound melodramas of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s (though he spent most of the 1950s in semi-retirement). Though Borzage has been the object of a handful of essays by major scholars and a 1981 monograph, he's virtually forgotten today—in part because he directed lowly melodramas, because his career was erroneously thought to have peaked in 1927–29 and thirty years of decline was not considered a very stable foundation on which critics could build an auteur, because he was too modest to toot his own horn when he was in his prime, and because he died in 1962 just before *la politique des auteurs* and the revival of interest in Hollywood cinema. The fact that only two or three of his films are currently available on DVD doesn't help any efforts to renew interest in his work. (A boxed set of F. W. Murnau and Borzage at Fox, comparable to the recent "Ford at Fox" collection, is due for release soon; though some might be surprised to find Borzage in the company of Murnau and Ford, they are indeed his peers.)

Dumont's book shines a long-overdue light on both the artist and the man. Borzage's life and film career have long been sites of rumors and mysteries. He was reputedly illiterate. No one knew why he ceased making films for almost ten years between *Moonrise* (1948) and *China Doll* (1958). One critic speculated that he had been blacklisted. Then there was the controversy over the authorship of one of his greatest films, *The Mortal Storm* (1940). After Borzage's death, producer Victor Saville claimed that he had acted as the film's director for "all but a week" of the shooting schedule because of Borzage's chronic alcoholism. Dumont's meticulous research has explained all of these mysteries and more. Borzage, who left school at the age of twelve to work, would routinely begin rehearsals by having the script girl read the script aloud to him, frequently standing with his back to the actors and the set in an attempt to visualize the scene. These facts, in addition to a mischievous interview that Borzage's longtime friend, John Ford, gave to *Positif* in the 1970s, proved to be the sources of the illiteracy rumor. Borzage was not illiterate.

The ten-year hiatus in Borzage's filmmaking career, interrupted by three half-hour television shows made in 1955–56, proves to be the most revealing mystery upon its solution. Tracking down two rare interviews from 1958, Dumont reports that Borzage refused the story material he was offered because it was too cynical and bleak. In the heyday of film noir, Borzage did not want to make "psychological dramas and gangster pictures," insisting, "I don't like or believe in [them]" (343). Borzage simply turned his back on an industry that was increasingly taking up darker and more violent subjects. Like Chico in *Seventh Heaven*, Borzage's motto was, "never look down—always look up!" So instead of making films, he played golf every day for ten years.

As for *The Mortal Storm*, Dumont cites letters written to him by cast members, including James Stewart, Robert Stack, and Gene Reynolds, who insist that Borzage was the only director on the film, a fact confirmed by a set of production stills which show Borzage directing all the major scenes in the film.

Dumont's discussion of the films themselves is guided by a novel thesis. Borzage was a Freemason. Borzage joined the Masons in 1919, eventually rising to the 32nd grade ("Master of the Royal Secret") in 1941. Dumont uses the narrative patterns of Mozart's *The Magic Flute* which Goethe read as a secret Masonic text (both Mozart and Goethe were Masons) to analyze Borzage's narratives as reworkings of the initiation ceremonies of the Ancient and Approved Scottish Rites of the Free & Accepted Masons of California. Those ceremonies and Borzage's narratives trace a spiritual trajectory from ignorance to knowledge and from loss of consciousness to a return to consciousness. Both the rites and the films move toward an awakening and regeneration through a series of ordeals that perfect the individual and produce a prelapsarian romantic couple.

The Freemason thesis seems a rather blunt instrument to use on such a subtle and complex filmmaker. It tends to close off rather than open up analysis by collapsing his work

into a set of beliefs established long before he began directing films. Much like labeling Hitchcock a Jesuit, it exposes one strand of a complex field of determinations that need to be pursued. It's not the *answer* to the meaning of a body of work that remains uniquely responsive to the complex network of individual and cultural forces that surrounded its creation, but one possible point of departure for a more wide-ranging study. Thankfully, after presenting the thesis in his introduction, Dumont relegates it to the background in his discussion of individual films which he brings to life through his nuanced discussion of specific details related to performances, setting, mise-en-scène, and editing. One glorious example comes from Dumont's discussion of what he refers to as a "sublime aside" in *Man's Castle* (1933). Trina (Loretta Young) stares longingly at an oven in a store window. Bill (Spencer Tracy), eating an ice cream cone, joins her. "Bill speaks sharply to her, interrupting (getting an oven . . . is out of the question!), but unperturbed. Trina presses herself against him, then responds to his harsh treatment by smiling, assenting docilely and with inflamed looks. This dialogue between people acting as if they don't hear, this antagonistic byplay rife with implications, where gestures contradict words, where sight relativizes what is heard . . . closes with a most characteristic 'Borzage touch': the second he turns his back to go, Bill leans towards Trina's ear and murmurs something: the young woman's face lights up, but the viewer is excluded from the confidence—and will remain so. This byplay reveals their unique rapport whose significance escapes even initiated viewers" (200–201). Bill later makes her a gift of the stove. Dumont's descriptive analysis has its hand on the pulse of the emotions that flow through the couple, evoking through a series of subtle details a depth of feeling that even Bill, in spite of his feigned gruffness, cannot hide. The interaction speaks to a romantic intimacy that distinguished Borzage from all other filmmakers who explored the lived experiences of the couple.

Dumont's research into Borzage's directorial techniques helps ground an observation that earlier critics have made about the space of his films in the actual space of their production. Borzage's lovers create an idealized, idyllic space for themselves that exists within but apart from a more impersonal, alienating, and even hostile space. The lovers in *Seventh Heaven*, *Street Angel* (1928), *The River* (1929), *Little Man, What Now?* (1934), *Man's Castle*, *Moonrise*, and *China Doll* create for themselves what Trina refers to as a "safety zone," a safe place in the middle of traffic where pedestrians can wait until the cars have gone by. On the studio set, Borzage created a similar "safety zone" for his actors. He never shouted or raised his voice but often knelt down next to actors and gently coaxed them into a mood suitable for eliciting the best possible performances for the scene at hand.

The concept of the "safety zone" suggests that Borzage might productively be explored in terms of what Jackson Lears in *No Place of Grace: Anti-Modernism and the Transformation of American Culture 1880–1920* (Pantheon, 1981) terms "anti-modernity." Borzage's films thus stand as implicit critiques of modernization (urbanization, industrialization, rationalization, mass culture) and of the alienation and cynicism that accompany modernity. In search of a "place of grace," Borzage's characters retreat to a protected spiritual and emotional space within the material conditions of modernity. They attempt to isolate themselves especially from those conditions surrounding war, economic depression, social upheaval, and from the moral depravity brought about by those conditions.

Finally, though Dumont, Scorsese, and others are to be commended for making this book available in English, McFarland has done a rather mediocre job in seeing it through to publication. The text is replete with typographical errors, missing words, and extraneous words. The original, glossy, matte-coated stock of the French edition has been replaced by a dull-finish, alkaline paper. The 440 photographs in the French edition, including sixteen pages in color (which looked glorious) have been reduced to only 116, all in black-and-white, and reproduced on a stock that limits their, sharpness, detail, and contrast ratio. © 2008 John Belton

JOHN BELTON, who teaches at Rutgers University, devoted one-third of his first book, *The Hollywood Professionals, Volume 3* (Tantivy, 1974) to Frank Borzage.

BOOK DATA Herve Dumont, *Frank Borzage: The Life and Films of a Hollywood Romantic*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2006. $55.00 cloth; $45.00 paper. 420 pages.

ARTHUR KNIGHT

Hollywood Be Thy Name: African American Religion in American Film, 1929–1949 by Judith Weisenfeld

Years ago, before much African American cinema—whether by that we mean, say, Oscar Micheaux films or Hollywood films with black characters—was available on video, I was doing research at the Library of Congress Motion Picture Division. A colleague approached me and asked, in effect, "what's the deal with all these scenes from early African American sound films that show a crowd of characters with arms upraised and casting outsized shadows to signify religious ecstasy?" Whatever I answered was lame. I wish that I'd

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been able to refer my friend to Judith Weisenfeld's *Hollywood Be Thy Name: African American Religion in American Film, 1929–1949*. Weisenfeld is a professor of religion, but *Hollywood Be Thy Name* proves amply that she is also a first-rate cinema scholar, at home both when working as a cultural historian and when working as a textual interpreter. Her book joins recent works like Heather Hendershot's *Shaking the World for Jesus: Media and Conservative Evangelical Culture* (University of Chicago Press, 2004) and Terry Lindvall's *Sanctuary Cinema: The Origins of the Christian Film Industry* (NYU Press, 2007) in expanding our understanding of how significantly religion and cinema have interacted, and it adds to these works by taking full account of the complex ways in which race, religion, and cinema have been interlaced in American movies.

Weisenfeld begins her work with the advent of sound cinema because, she argues, "filmmakers were particularly drawn to the possibilities that black religious music offered for the new sound technology, and [they] . . . recognized the aesthetic power of African American religious expression, so often grounded in using the body's sound and motion as conduits to the divine" (5). This aesthetic power—for instance, those upraised hands—and the prominence of black church denominations, freshly visible in the 1920s and 30s in the urban north, made African American religion a "natural subject matter for the movies" (3). But Weisenfeld doesn't mean "natural" as an unreflective category. Rather, she means it as a category that must be probed for the "varied motivations" (3) that undergird it and the ideological functions it serves. *Hollywood Be Thy Name* performs this probing in impressive detail and across a wide array of materials and socio-cultural terrains.

In fact, *Hollywood Be Thy Name*, a phrase drawn from a Langston Hughes letter quoting a (in his words) "backwoods church entertainment given by a magician" in Georgia, is at once a perfect and a flawed title for Weisenfeld's ambitious volume. It's perfect because it captures the sense of the emphatic overlapping and interlacing between religion and film that so rightly interests Weisenfeld. It's flawed because it hides a great virtue of this book—namely that it is not exclusively about Hollywood films.

Weisenfeld begins in Hollywood with chapters on King Vidor's first sound film *Hallelujah* (1929) and the film adaptation of the huge theatrical hit *The Green Pastures* (1936). However, from there she moves to two chapters that consider race films and, specifically, the religious films *The Blood of Jesus* (1941) and *Go Down Death* (1944) by black filmmaker Spencer Williams. And she concludes with chapters that focus on films made off-Hollywood, as it were, but by Hollywood-connected filmmakers: *The Negro Soldier* (1944), made by Frank Capra's army film unit, and *Lost Boundaries* (1949), a story about passing made during the late 1940s cycle of "social problem films" and produced by Louis de Rochemont. All of these films have been seriously neglected in critical scholarly literature. The exception is perhaps *Cabin in the Sky* (1943). Weisenfeld treats *Cabin in the Sky* in comparison with *The Negro Soldier* as a way of examining how World War II-era films worked to revise representations of black religion in an effort to engage African Americans' support for a war being fought for values they too infrequently benefited from.

The reason these films have been neglected, although Weisenfeld doesn't say so in as many words, is arguably because they so strongly manifest the theme of black Christian religion. Scholars have been much more inclined to draw analytic and interpretive boundaries around these works based on categories such as genre and auteur (consequently *Cabin in the Sky*'s relative familiarity) or modes of production and their interaction with race (e.g., Hollywood vs. race film). Weisenfeld doesn't neglect these categories—she recognizes their presence and effect and, as I suggested, different modes of production provide a broad and useful organization for the book—but she also makes plain that such categories are hardly determining, especially when the experiences of African American audiences are taken into account. And she is abidingly interested in what black audiences—she emphasizes the plurality, that African Americans were not a monolithic group—made of these films, and is impressively inventive in finding evidence of these audiences and their responses in press reports, letters, and autobiographies, and the files of churches, studios, and government organizations.

Weisenfeld's research and interpretive prowess is probably most spectacularly on display in her chapter that focuses on Spencer Williams's films (though I should add that she also touches on several other "black-audience religious films" on her way to Williams). I suspect that any film scholar who has encountered these films has been impressed by their uniqueness. They are astounding—and, in my experience, many students find them galvanizing if also hard to get a handle on. While there have been a couple of useful essays on these films, Weisenfeld gives us an account that provides broader contexts in black religious practices (including useful reflections on Williams's likely knowledge of both Protestant and Catholic theology and worship styles), in other even less well-known black-audience films, and in the production and distribution histories of the films. It seems there is not an archive she has not been to and combed carefully. This chapter will certainly ensure that I teach *The Blood of*

Jesus and *Go Down Death* even more thoroughly and mindfully from now on.

The arc of Weisenfeld's argument is qualifiedly—strongly qualifiedly—progressive. At least in terms of Hollywood and Hollywood-independent films, she notes a shift from representations that invest heavily in sexualizing African American religious practice to representations that aspire to be universal and humanist. There is change here and Weisenfeld seems inclined (as did critics like, say, Ralph Ellison) to see this change as good—or at least OK. But with her nuanced reading of *Lost Boundaries* she also notes that even while this film, and others like it, used "religious arguments" to "broaden the category of American citizenship," it also has religion "function . . . as a powerful means of reaffirming racial categories and boundaries" (213). In the final paragraph of the book's conclusion, Weisenfeld asserts that the intersection of race and religion remains charged and powerful in American film, but she hints that more substantial changes in representation have occurred with the "rise of independent film . . . and the participation of black filmmakers in this movement" (238). She leaves this assertion tantalizingly broad and undetailed, saying "that is a story for another book." Anyone who has seen a Tyler Perry movie (to name just one instance) in the last few years should root for Weisenfeld to write that other book. © 2008 Arthur Knight

ARTHUR KNIGHT directs the Literary and Cultural Studies and Film Studies Programs and teaches American Studies and English at the College of William & Mary.

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STEPHEN PRINCE

The Frodo Franchise: "The Lord of the Rings" and Modern Hollywood by Kristin Thompson

In *The Frodo Franchise*, Kristin Thompson gives us a comprehensive and very detailed portrait of Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings* in its many incarnations—as a series of movies, games, video supplements, Internet properties, and other manifestations of a franchise that seems unending. In light of the film's enormous fan base, its influential use of digital filmmaking tools, its global revenues, and its appeal across different media, Thompson writes that "quite apart from what fans or detractors may think of the movie, it can fairly claim to be one of the most historically significant films ever made" (8).

Thompson clearly finds this to be a persuasive claim, and her own work as an academic film historian lends her assessment of the film and its claims to significance considerable weight. She aims to place the film (understood as a single entity, but actually a trilogy of three films) into its multifaceted context as a movie blockbuster and as the hugely successful product of a globalized media economy. "Not just as a film trilogy but as a larger phenomenon, *Rings* reveals a great deal about the changes going on in Hollywood in this transitional era of globalization and new media" (10).

She also writes as a fan of Tolkien and of the Jackson films, and this personal connection to the material makes for a very warm and lively book rather than a musty academic treatise. Her chapter on fandom, for example, is entitled "Fans on the Margins, Pervy Hobbit Fanciers and Partygoers." She confesses that initially she was skeptical of Jackson's project and feared that it might turn out to be just the kind of film she dislikes—a prestigious, overly respectful literary adaptation made with an eye on the Oscars. Instead, it turned out to be a fun movie, and Thompson embraces this quality in the work, finding, for example, that Jackson has blended numerous popular genres with Tolkien's narrative. These include horror, martial arts, swashbucklers, war films, and Westerns. She quotes approvingly Jackson's remark that he is still the same guy who made a zombie movie (*Dead Alive*, 1992) and would like to make one again some day. Frame enlargments in the book compare Bruce Lee's martial-arts moves with those of Legolas (Orlando Bloom).

Thompson is fair to critics of Jackson's approach, and she quotes several, including disparaging remarks by Peter Bogdanovich about the child-oriented design of popular movies today compared with earlier decades. And she acknowledges that Jackson's is not a traditional take on Tolkien, that he aims for a more adolescent taste than did Tolkien, that the action elements are more pumped-up and extended in the movies, and that the monsters get more attention on the screen than on the page: "A book about imaginatively conceived characters on a lengthy journey interspersed with skirmishes has been turned into what some might see as a gallery of battles and monsters" (54). As a Tolkien fan, Thompson nevertheless approves of these emphases because they enabled the film to reach a larger audience composed of non-Tolkien readers. "For them, the narrative was altered and simplified. It took advantage of the novel's many major settings, fantastical creatures, and huge battles, all of which lent themselves to special effects and epic scenes of a sort familiar from blockbusters in various genres" (56).

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Crafted in this way, the film became the global phenomenon that Thompson covers in detail. She examines the

history of the production, the deal-making between New Line, its co-president Bob Shaye, and Jackson. She covers the film's production design and special-effects work in post-production. In this latter context, she was fortunate to visit New Zealand for a month in 2003, while *The Return of the King* was in post-production and where she was able to interview Jackson, members of the cast and crew, and effects artists at Weta Digital and other firms. Thompson discusses the film's innovative use of subsurface scattering and digital grading, two visual effects tools that have gone on to become industry standards utilized in numerous films.

Because what she calls the Frodo Franchise is bigger than the films, Thompson spends most of the book examining the huge economic and cultural infrastructure that grew up around the movies. This included the marketing machinery deployed by New Line, design of the trailers for the movies, and all of the ancillary materials. These included DVDs, which were released and re-released in new, upgraded editions that included increasingly comprehensive supplementary materials. Ancillary materials also included computer games, in which Jackson took a keen interest, and the Internet as a mechanism for marketing and communicating with the huge Tolkien fan base.

The film's success transformed New Zealand, and Thompson includes a fascinating discussion of the New Zealand government's participation in the controlled rebranding of the country, helping it to shed its sleepy, staid image in the interests of boosting tourism.

The *Lord of the Rings* films became a powerful engine of the global consumer economy. Thompson explains how this happened and the many forms in which the films circulated and money changed hands. *The Frodo Franchise* is the best case study yet written about film as a commodity in the global marketplace. If you're a fan of the movies, the book is a trove of fascinating information. And even if you're skeptical about the films' artistic accomplishments, Thompson shows why they remain historically important works. © 2008 Stephen Prince

STEPHEN PRINCE, a professor at Virginia Tech, is the author of *The Warrior's Camera: The Cinema of Akira Kurosawa* (Princeton University Press, 1992), *Classical Film Violence: Designing and Regulating Brutality in Hollywood Cinema, 1930–1968* (Rutgers University Press, 2003), and numerous other books on film.

BOOK DATA Kristin Thompson, *The Frodo Franchise: "The Lord of the Rings" and Modern Hollywood*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007. $39.95 cloth; $18.95 paper. 424 pages.

ANNE MOREY

George Gallup in Hollywood by Susan Ohmer

Charles Foster Kane dismissed his wife Susan as a "cross-section of the American public," but Susan would have found an admirer in George Gallup, who had a contract with RKO as Orson Welles was filming those lines there. Gallup refined the techniques and science of audience measurement and proffered the fruits of his research to Hollywood during a moment of dramatic transition in the late 1930s to the mid-40s. Susan Ohmer's account of Gallup's career in Hollywood is important, impeccably researched, and generally absorbing. Her ten-chapter narrative, the first book-length treatment of this important figure, takes the reader swiftly from Gallup's Iowa childhood and education through his career in advertising and political polling in the 1930s to his work in the film industry through the mid-40s. Four chapters recount in strikingly helpful and interesting detail Gallup's labors on behalf of RKO, Samuel Goldwyn, David O. Selznick, and Walt Disney, examining specific campaigns such as audience preferences for or against single or double features, the advertising of *Gone With the Wind* (1939), and the reception of *Fantasia* (1940). Throughout these, the most interesting chapters, Ohmer supplies crucial institutional information as it is needed contextually and has a keen eye for the telling fact—in 1941, for example, "Gallup found that 46 percent of Americans had not even heard of the Hays Office" (138). Gallup perfected the art of atomizing the motion picture into its distinct variables of story, title, and marquee value of performer in order to create for studio moguls (who often distrusted his findings) some sense of control over an increasingly risky and ever more expensive business. Ohmer demonstrates how Gallup's work allowed Selznick a greater measure of independence from MGM in the marketing of *Gone With the Wind* than he might have achieved without it. Her findings suggest how Gallup's efforts permitted a certain amount of interference with (or guidance to) the film industry by figures positioned largely outside it (such as Nelson Rockefeller). Gallup's efforts for Disney afford a fascinating window onto his notoriously troubled labor relations. Nor does Ohmer take Gallup's findings at face value; rather, she carefully identifies sources of bias and interpretive difficulty. As a free-standing work of film history, the book is admirable: it represents the culmination of massive research efforts and a sure command of the immediate institutional context, presented in a well-written and appealing package.

As film history matures, however, film historians must increasingly labor to explore and articulate the connections

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The *Lord of the Rings* films became a powerful engine of the global consumer economy. Thompson explains how this happened and the many forms in which the films circulated and money changed hands. *The Frodo Franchise* is the best case study yet written about film as a commodity in the global marketplace. If you're a fan of the movies, the book is a trove of fascinating information. And even if you're skeptical about the films' artistic accomplishments, Thompson shows why they remain historically important works. © 2008 Stephen Prince

STEPHEN PRINCE, a professor at Virginia Tech, is the author of *The Warrior's Camera: The Cinema of Akira Kurosawa* (Princeton University Press, 1992), *Classical Film Violence: Designing and Regulating Brutality in Hollywood Cinema, 1930–1968* (Rutgers University Press, 2003), and numerous other books on film.

BOOK DATA Kristin Thompson, *The Frodo Franchise: "The Lord of the Rings" and Modern Hollywood*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007. $39.95 cloth; $18.95 paper. 424 pages.

ANNE MOREY

George Gallup in Hollywood by Susan Ohmer

Charles Foster Kane dismissed his wife Susan as a "cross-section of the American public," but Susan would have found an admirer in George Gallup, who had a contract with RKO as Orson Welles was filming those lines there. Gallup refined the techniques and science of audience measurement and proffered the fruits of his research to Hollywood during a moment of dramatic transition in the late 1930s to the mid-40s. Susan Ohmer's account of Gallup's career in Hollywood is important, impeccably researched, and generally absorbing. Her ten-chapter narrative, the first book-length treatment of this important figure, takes the reader swiftly from Gallup's Iowa childhood and education through his career in advertising and political polling in the 1930s to his work in the film industry through the mid-40s. Four chapters recount in strikingly helpful and interesting detail Gallup's labors on behalf of RKO, Samuel Goldwyn, David O. Selznick, and Walt Disney, examining specific campaigns such as audience preferences for or against single or double features, the advertising of *Gone With the Wind* (1939), and the reception of *Fantasia* (1940). Throughout these, the most interesting chapters, Ohmer supplies crucial institutional information as it is needed contextually and has a keen eye for the telling fact—in 1941, for example, "Gallup found that 46 percent of Americans had not even heard of the Hays Office" (138). Gallup perfected the art of atomizing the motion picture into its distinct variables of story, title, and marquee value of performer in order to create for studio moguls (who often distrusted his findings) some sense of control over an increasingly risky and ever more expensive business. Ohmer demonstrates how Gallup's work allowed Selznick a greater measure of independence from MGM in the marketing of *Gone With the Wind* than he might have achieved without it. Her findings suggest how Gallup's efforts permitted a certain amount of interference with (or guidance to) the film industry by figures positioned largely outside it (such as Nelson Rockefeller). Gallup's efforts for Disney afford a fascinating window onto his notoriously troubled labor relations. Nor does Ohmer take Gallup's findings at face value; rather, she carefully identifies sources of bias and interpretive difficulty. As a free-standing work of film history, the book is admirable: it represents the culmination of massive research efforts and a sure command of the immediate institutional context, presented in a well-written and appealing package.

As film history matures, however, film historians must increasingly labor to explore and articulate the connections

between the industry and the larger cultural matrices that shape and contain it. Ohmer makes those contextual gestures early in the book with her account of Gallup's Iowa boyhood as a necessary precursor to later populist sentiments, and in describing the increasingly "scientific" and professional forms of industrial psychology. In the later chapters, however, Ohmer's findings sometimes tantalizingly lack an attempt to anchor them to larger trends or social developments, particularly in the realm of the history of American taste cultures. Gallup and his assistant David Ogilvy discovered that the filmgoing audience was largely poor and young, immediately suggesting the importance of Ohmer's research to long-running scholarly discussions of the place in film culture played by the upper middle class, a conversation that Ohmer does not explicitly invoke here. Ogilvy attempted to direct RKO to create more pictures ostensibly in line with the tastes of this poor and young population (e.g., baseball, not horse racing) with only modest success. But, as Ohmer reports, Ogilvy both defended and condescended to this audience, addressing RKO's perception of risk without assuaging its legitimate concerns about the production of culture in a republic (a perdurable problem in American Studies, going back, of course, to Toqueville). By the final chapter, a brief account of a kind of backlash against Gallup's scientism in film production, the reader longs for a means of attaching this discussion to, for example, Jackson Lears's very important account of the overt politicization of taste cultures during the Cold War, "A Matter of Taste: Corporate Cultural Hegemony in a Mass-Consumption Society," in *Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of Cold War* (ed. Lary May, University of Chicago Press, 1989). Ohmer effectively discusses the roots of this politicization of taste, but leaves it to the reader to infer the connections with the later moment.

The book is most conservative in not pressing the connections between the political and the filmic further. Ohmer carefully identifies the political affiliations of the parties involved, and her account of Gallup's political polling is informative, but the book might have said more about the rhetoric of box-office-as-plebiscite that litters the trade papers and general circulation periodicals from the 1910s and 20s. The move from the overtly political (polling for presidential candidates) to the indirectly political (the casting of Vivian Leigh as Scarlett as a referendum on Southern womanhood) is clearly but a step. Is the connection simply one of shared forms of behavior—we can "vote" for films at the box office as we vote for presidents, and our tastes in the former can even be measured, as Ohmer reports, on the "Hopkins 'Televoting' Machine" (221)? Or is there some more important similarity at stake in, for example, attempting to enfranchise those whose access to culture differs significantly from that of the middle class?

These cavils aside, Ohmer's book is a major achievement, and it will be a significant reference for any scholar wishing to consider the relationship between the audience and the film industry in the 1930s and 40s. © 2008 Anne Morey

ANNE MOREY's book *Hollywood Outsiders: The Adaptation of the Film Industry, 1913–1934* (University of Minnesota Press, 2003) deals with Hollywood's critics and co-opters in the later silent and early sound periods.

BOOK DATA Susan Ohmer, *George Gallup in Hollywood.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2006. $72.50 cloth; $25.50 paperback. 281 pages.

REBECCA PRIME

The Marxist and the Movies: A Biography of Paul Jarrico by Larry Ceplair

Paul who? In his new biography of the blacklisted screenwriter Paul Jarrico, Larry Ceplair doesn't shy away from his subject's obscurity. Jarrico was not an "A list" blacklisted writer like Dalton Trumbo, nor did he make any notable screenwriting contributions during his post-Hollywood career in Europe. Instead, Ceplair argues, Jarrico's historical significance lies in his tireless attempts to beat the Hollywood blacklist. Whether fighting the major studios in the courts or spearheading a successful WGA campaign to restore screen credits to blacklisted writers, Jarrico devoted the majority of his adult life to righting the injustices of the blacklist.

Jarrico was also a diligent archivist, meticulously preserving his personal and professional correspondence for the historical record. For Ceplair, the scholarly potential of this archive more than make up for Jarrico's lackluster Hollywood career. In keeping with his understanding of the historian's obligation to "shine a glaring spotlight into every corner . . . to fill every blank and clarify every obscurity" (237), Ceplair suggests that Jarrico's well-documented life provides "an excellent lens through which to view the radical and mainstream political cultures of the United States during the twentieth century and, in particular, the relationship between a dedicated Marxist and the Hollywood motion picture industry" (viii).

This is familiar terrain for Ceplair, co-author with Steven Englund of the magisterial *The Inquisition in Hollywood: Politics in the Film Community, 1930–1960* (University of California Press, 1983), the most comprehensive account of the radical community in Hollywood and the motion picture blacklist. *The Marxist and the Movies* emphasizes Jarrico's

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years in Hollywood: his emerging radical consciousness, his evolution as a screenwriter, his prominent role in the Hollywood communist community, and his ceaseless drive to fight the blacklist. The last third of the book is devoted to a briefer, if fascinating, description of Jarrico's life among the blacklisted émigrés in Europe during the late 1950s and 60s, and to his final years in Hollywood. What emerges is a vivid portrait of a man whose profound political commitment weathered the storms of the Cold War and continued to define him up until his death in 1997.

Jarrico was born Israel Payssah Shapiro in 1915 in Los Angeles, the only child of Russian Jewish immigrants. His attraction to communism was aroused by the Depression, but it wasn't until he was a working screenwriter in Hollywood (and had, upon the advice of his agent, changed his name to something less overtly Jewish) that he joined the Party. The contradictions of Hollywood's cocktail-party communism were evident from the scene of his induction at the exclusive Hillcrest Country Club. "'It was,' he remembered, 'rather peculiar . . . to be sitting in this den of capitalist iniquity with two sons of film executives [Maurice Rapf and Budd Schulberg], and another screenwriter, asking me to join the club'" (38). But Jarrico was a true believer and did his best to produce scripts that were politically meaningful, only to see his efforts neutered time and again. The Ginger Rogers romantic comedy *Tom Dick and Harry* (1941) earned him an Oscar nomination but was stripped of the class commentary he had envisioned. In 1942, when MGM offered him the pro-Soviet *Song of Russia* (1944), Jarrico thought that the opportunity to marry his politics and writing had finally arrived. Instead, his involvement with a film he would later dismiss as "a diluted sentimental hodge-podge" would bring him to the attention of the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC), for whom the film served as a key example of the kind of communist propaganda being produced by Hollywood Reds (70).

Jarrico's Hollywood career ended abruptly in 1951, when he was subpoenaed in HUAC's second sweep of Hollywood. Undaunted, Jarrico formed an independent production company as a means of thumbing his nose at the "climate of fear" cultivated by the blacklist (139). The company's only production, *Salt of the Earth* (1953), was subject to a theater boycott as a result of pressure from anti-communist groups. In 1958, Jarrico and his wife Sylvia joined the blacklisted exile community in Paris, where Jarrico's brother-in-law, the screenwriter Michael Wilson, was much in demand. Despite the lift from Wilson's coat-tails, Jarrico's career continued to flounder, along with his marriage. For the next twenty years, Jarrico would lead a peripatetic existence, shuffling from Paris to London to Nice and back on the trail of work opportunities, before finally returning to Hollywood in 1977. Through friends from the blacklisted community, he found work writing for television, but earned only one final—and unlikely—screen credit: for the Charles Bronson action film *Messenger of Death* (1988).

What *The Marxist and the Movies* makes abundantly clear is just how little room post-war Hollywood had for a politically committed screenwriter. This is, of course, a foregone conclusion, amply demonstrated by the efficacy of the Hollywood blacklist. The chief merit of Ceplair's very readable study lies not so much in any new revelations as to the nature or consequences of the blacklist, but in its exemplary use of Jarrico's personal archive to present a life defined by this event. A man who "never saw anything but potentialities" (138) in the words of a friend, Jarrico responded to the blacklist with considerable courage and aplomb, if also with drink and fiscal recklessness (he was a notorious scrounger). *The Marxist and the Movies* joins Gerald Horne's recent biography of John Howard Lawson (University of California Press, 2006), and a number of very good memoirs by the blacklisted, in documenting the toll the blacklist exacted on individual lives, but also the unexpected professional and personal opportunities it created. Jarrico may not have been Hollywood's greatest screenwriter, but thanks to his efforts with the WGA, many of his more talented colleagues are ensured the credit they deserve. © 2008 Rebecca Prime

REBECCA PRIME is a Ph.D. candidate in Cinema and Media Studies in UCLA's Department of Film, Television, and Digital Media.

BOOK DATA Larry Ceplair, *The Marxist and the Movies: A Biography of Paul Jarrico*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2007. $40.00 cloth. 352 pages.

GREGORY A. WALLER

Americanizing the Movies and "Movie-Mad" Audiences, 1910–1914 by Richard Abel

Over the past twenty-five years, the wealth of historical research on early cinema in the United States has been prompted by and, in turn, has generated several overarching claims or queries concerning the relation between the cinema of attractions and various narrative forms; the increasing ubiquity of motion pictures as an aspect of everyday life; the links between cinema and modernity; the struggles to monitor and control audiences, venues, and screen subjects; and the practices and conditions of film exhibition, in and out of

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the theater. Richard Abel's meticulous research has contributed significantly to our understanding of these topics, above all to the complex process by which film in the United States became American. *Americanizing the Movies and "Movie-Mad" Audiences* extends and amplifies the compelling argument of Abel's *The Red Rooster Scare: Making Cinema American, 1900–1910* (University of California Press, 1999), that the popularization and institutionalization of motion pictures as a communication technology and a form of mass entertainment in the United States went hand-in-hand with the Americanization of the movies.

Building on Benedict Anderson's often-cited theory of the nation as "imagined community," Abel explores how, for example, films focusing on cowboys, "cowboy girls," and Native Americans during the early 1910s articulate larger concerns about the contours of "American modernity," a national identity that required its own heroes, unassimilated Other, and mythic landscapes, as well as its own form of gendered whiteness. The wave of Civil War films from the same period likewise offers what Abel calls a "usable past" (143) rendered through the conventions of sensational melodrama, the cinematic mode that also became the vehicle for pictures centering on the adventures of detectives and intrepid young heroines. Abel's ability to move across these different cycles and genres significantly strengthens his argument about the Americanization of the movies and about cinema's role in larger social and cultural imperatives concerning national identity.

In this regard, an especially notable achievement of *Americanizing the Movies* is its breadth and comprehensiveness in covering certain patterns of film production between 1910–14. This book abounds with information about specific films, though only a few individual titles receive more than a paragraph or two. Abel's approach yields, for example, fresh insights about even the much-discussed *Traffic in Souls* (1913), while also permitting us to follow—almost title-by-title—film cycles, like the short-lived vogue for action-packed "animal pictures" produced by Selig and others. At its best, this approach allows Abel effectively to identify recurring tropes, chart ideological emphases, and measure gender and class dynamics across a wide variety of films—no easy task, particularly when it is based on a painstaking and comprehensive survey of primary material, including extant archival prints.

Of even greater value to film historians than Abel's claims about whiteness, melodrama, and Americanization is, I think, the quite extraordinary amount of research he has done on distribution and local exhibition practices across regions of the United States that have heretofore been largely ignored by scholars. Recent years have seen considerable research done on silent-era film exhibition and audiences in localities far removed from New York City and Chicago. Abel adds much to this mapping of moviegoing America by examining cities across a northern corridor that includes Boston, Massachusetts; Cleveland and Toledo, Ohio; Minneapolis, Minnesota; and Des Moines, Iowa. In addition to trade magazines, his prime source is newspapers, and *Americanizing the Movies* demonstrates again that the local press constitutes an invaluable—and frequently unique—archive of advertising and other movie-related discourse.

Rather than use newspapers to examine theater ownership and design, censorship battles, or idiosyncratic localized practices, Abel relies on this source to speculate about the "range of picture theaters" that by 1914 "dominated the urban landscape" (54) and—more important—to present the fullest view available of film distribution in the early 1910s, when feature films became an important part of the motion picture business. Complementing scholarship by Janet Staiger, Michael Quinn, and others on the Motion Pictures Patents Company and the role of feature films, Abel takes a ground-level view, reading the traces of distribution practices in advertisements and booking patterns for a number of cities. How were films packaged for distribution? To what extent was the program standardized, rationalized, and/or nationalized in this period? When and where and for how long did motion pictures circulate? Local newspapers may not provide categorical answers, but they do contain extremely useful information bearing on these basic questions, as Abel repeatedly demonstrates.

In addition, urban newspapers—read in light of editorials and reviews in the trade press—provide at least a second-hand glimpse of audience tastes, in so far as we can see the preferences of moviegoers in the early 1910s manifested in exhibitors' advertising claims and in the day-to-day booking of individual theaters. For example, evidence about specific films and theaters from newspapers in Baltimore, Cleveland, Toledo, and Lynn, Massachusetts helps lead Abel to conclude that "westerns played an unusually important role in regularizing and Americanizing the distribution and exhibition of moving pictures in the United States" (79).

Perhaps most interestingly, a thorough and attentive look at the press—both trade and local—enables Abel to mount what he justly claims is "a more finely nuanced analysis of the nature and function of the star system" (232) at this definitive historical moment. The star system takes center stage in the final chapter of *Americanizing the Movies*, which surveys advertising to track the growth of this business strategy, discusses various promotional giveaways and contests, and focuses, in particular, on the appearance of material related to picture personalities in syndicated newspaper columns. The broader

implication of Abel's approach to the early 1910s is not novel, but it surely bears repeating: contemporary print discourse is absolutely crucial to any understanding of film history.

Not all that Abel has to say about the emergence of the star system can be directly connected to his thesis about Americanization, but tracking the syndicated newspaper columns written in 1912–13 by Gertrude Price, for example, makes *Americanizing the Movies* a richer book. So, too, does the reprinting of a number of period documents such as the *New York Dramatic Mirror*'s review of *The Battle of Gettysburg* (1913) and the inclusion of five mini-chapters that Abel calls "Entr'actes," which consider, for example, illustrated songs and nonfiction film, two often-overlooked parts of the motion picture program. These added attractions, coupled with Abel's broad argument about Americanization and film distribution, and buttressed by a wealth of original research, make *Americanizing the Movies* an important addition to our understanding of American cinema during the silent era. © 2008 Gregory A. Waller

GREGORY A. WALLER is chair of the Department of Communication and Culture at Indiana University, Bloomington.

BOOK DATA Richard Abel, *Americanizing the Movies and "Movie-Mad" Audiences, 1910–1914*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006. $70.00 cloth; $31.95 paper. 391 pages.

MEGAN WILLIAMS

Nineteenth-Century American Fiction on Screen, ed. R. Barton Palmer

Twentieth-Century American Fiction on Screen, ed. R. Barton Palmer

In keeping with recent work in adaptation studies, these two volumes share Robert Stam's belief that the literary text is open and can be endlessly reworked. Persistently in dialogue with previous scholarship—notably Stam and Alessandra Raengo's *Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation* (Blackwell, 2005), Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation* (Routledge, 2006), and James Naremore's *Film Adaptation* (Rutgers University Press, 2000)—both sets of essays refuse to privilege either the source literary text or any separation between cinema and literature or their associated academic subject areas. However, both collections are accessible to a general audience as well as scholars and students. Taken together, the two volumes afford an excellent introduction to the different ways adaptation theory plays out in practice. By organization, the volumes are easily adapted for use in the classroom.

Thomas Leitch's essay on *The Killers* is a particularly fine example of the difficulties and complexities inherent in the analysis of an adaptation. After examining Hemingway's short story, and then Don Siegel's 1964 version and Robert Siodmak's 1946 adaptation, Leitch concludes that Siegel's 1964 version was shaped more by studio rules, marketing positions, and star personae than by Hemingway's story or Siodmak's film. In his analysis, Leitch poses what may be the central question of this two-volume study: using *The Killers* as a case study, he asks why critics have universally assumed that Hemingway's story is the most important "source text," an assumption that makes all other informing texts subordinate contexts in an "artificial hierarchy of relative weight" (*Twentieth*, 41).

Palmer's collections differ from recent adaptation studies in their American focus. The selection from American fiction allows close connections to be made between different films and their production contexts, as can be seen in the internal dialogue sparked by Allen Woll's "*The Color Purple*: Translating the African-American Novel for Hollywood" and Marc C. Connor's "The Specter of History: Filming Memory in *Beloved*." Woll's essay interweaves a basic history of the African American presence in film with a discussion of the complex negotiations between Steven Spielberg, Alice Walker, Oprah Winfrey, and Whoopi Goldberg that informed the film's production. Of particular interest is Woll's use of Walker's journal entries and the record they provide of her reaction to the widespread criticism of the portrayal of African American men and their families in both novel and film. In his discussion of the failure of the 1998 film version of *Beloved* to account for the novel's historical complexities, Connor suggests that the "cultural capacity" Oprah brought to bear on the film may have damaged its outcome, in contrast to the pre-star status she exerted on *The Color Purple* (*Twentieth*, 203). These two essays form great teaching companions; each traces Oprah's career, and each addresses the representations of African American men, providing a welcome revision to the negative view of the depiction of black men's sexuality in *The Color Purple*. Spielberg's work is also discussed in R. Barton Palmer's essay on Terrence Malick's 1999 adaptation of James Jones's *The Thin Red Line*. Palmer explores how Malick's film competed, albeit unintentionally, in the public eye with Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) as part of a cultural search during the 1990s to find the meaning of the American experience in World War II. (Palmer's essay interestingly counterpoints William Rodney Allen's chapter on "World War II Through the Lens of Vietnam: Adapting *Slaughterhouse-Five* to Film.") In addition to the above-mentioned articles, the twentieth-century volume in-

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Not all that Abel has to say about the emergence of the star system can be directly connected to his thesis about Americanization, but tracking the syndicated newspaper columns written in 1912–13 by Gertrude Price, for example, makes *Americanizing the Movies* a richer book. So, too, does the reprinting of a number of period documents such as the *New York Dramatic Mirror*'s review of *The Battle of Gettysburg* (1913) and the inclusion of five mini-chapters that Abel calls "Entr'actes," which consider, for example, illustrated songs and nonfiction film, two often-overlooked parts of the motion picture program. These added attractions, coupled with Abel's broad argument about Americanization and film distribution, and buttressed by a wealth of original research, make *Americanizing the Movies* an important addition to our understanding of American cinema during the silent era. © 2008 Gregory A. Waller

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BOOK DATA Richard Abel, *Americanizing the Movies and "Movie-Mad" Audiences, 1910–1914*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006. $70.00 cloth; $31.95 paper. 391 pages.

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Nineteenth-Century American Fiction on Screen, ed. R. Barton Palmer

Twentieth-Century American Fiction on Screen, ed. R. Barton Palmer

In keeping with recent work in adaptation studies, these two volumes share Robert Stam's belief that the literary text is open and can be endlessly reworked. Persistently in dialogue with previous scholarship—notably Stam and Alessandra Raengo's *Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation* (Blackwell, 2005), Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation* (Routledge, 2006), and James Naremore's *Film Adaptation* (Rutgers University Press, 2000)—both sets of essays refuse to privilege either the source literary text or any separation between cinema and literature or their associated academic subject areas. However, both collections are accessible to a general audience as well as scholars and students. Taken together, the two volumes afford an excellent introduction to the different ways adaptation theory plays out in practice. By organization, the volumes are easily adapted for use in the classroom.

Thomas Leitch's essay on *The Killers* is a particularly fine example of the difficulties and complexities inherent in the analysis of an adaptation. After examining Hemingway's short story, and then Don Siegel's 1964 version and Robert Siodmak's 1946 adaptation, Leitch concludes that Siegel's 1964 version was shaped more by studio rules, marketing positions, and star personae than by Hemingway's story or Siodmak's film. In his analysis, Leitch poses what may be the central question of this two-volume study: using *The Killers* as a case study, he asks why critics have universally assumed that Hemingway's story is the most important "source text," an assumption that makes all other informing texts subordinate contexts in an "artificial hierarchy of relative weight" (*Twentieth*, 41).

Palmer's collections differ from recent adaptation studies in their American focus. The selection from American fiction allows close connections to be made between different films and their production contexts, as can be seen in the internal dialogue sparked by Allen Woll's "*The Color Purple*: Translating the African-American Novel for Hollywood" and Marc C. Connor's "The Specter of History: Filming Memory in *Beloved*." Woll's essay interweaves a basic history of the African American presence in film with a discussion of the complex negotiations between Steven Spielberg, Alice Walker, Oprah Winfrey, and Whoopi Goldberg that informed the film's production. Of particular interest is Woll's use of Walker's journal entries and the record they provide of her reaction to the widespread criticism of the portrayal of African American men and their families in both novel and film. In his discussion of the failure of the 1998 film version of *Beloved* to account for the novel's historical complexities, Connor suggests that the "cultural capacity" Oprah brought to bear on the film may have damaged its outcome, in contrast to the pre-star status she exerted on *The Color Purple* (*Twentieth*, 203). These two essays form great teaching companions; each traces Oprah's career, and each addresses the representations of African American men, providing a welcome revision to the negative view of the depiction of black men's sexuality in *The Color Purple*. Spielberg's work is also discussed in R. Barton Palmer's essay on Terrence Malick's 1999 adaptation of James Jones's *The Thin Red Line*. Palmer explores how Malick's film competed, albeit unintentionally, in the public eye with Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) as part of a cultural search during the 1990s to find the meaning of the American experience in World War II. (Palmer's essay interestingly counterpoints William Rodney Allen's chapter on "World War II Through the Lens of Vietnam: Adapting *Slaughterhouse-Five* to Film.") In addition to the above-mentioned articles, the twentieth-century volume in-

cludes essays on *Intruder in the Dust* (1949), *The Member of the Wedding* (1953), *Lolita* (1962, 1997), *Ship of Fools* (1965), *The Day of the Locust* (1974), *The Last Tycoon* (1976), *Wise Blood* (1979), *Naked Lunch* (1991), and *Short Cuts* (1993)—the work of "major" literary authors adapted by mostly auteur directors (Robert Altman, David Cronenberg, John Huston, Elia Kazan, Stanley Kramer, Stanley Kubrick, John Schlesinger, and Fred Zinneman).

Both volumes take 1930—the beginning of the sound era—as their starting points and work their way to films today. As Palmer notes, the number of film/novel adaptations of twentieth-century literary works far exceeds adaptations of nineteenth-century works. He attributes this distribution, in part, to Hollywood's tendency to market "modernity" and in part to the fact that Hollywood engages the nineteenth century primarily through the Western, an essentially twentieth-century form. Not surprisingly, Hollywood's use of nineteenth-century novels corresponds to the literary canon. Thus, this volume primarily examines canonical writers who wrote in popular genres: the Christian Sentimental novel (*Ben Hur*, *Little Women*, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*); mystery and romance (*The Last of the Mohicans*, *Moby-Dick*, *Murders in the Rue Morgue*, *The Scarlet Letter*); and realist and naturalist novels (*Daisy Miller*, *The Europeans*, *The Portrait of a Lady*, *The Red Badge of Courage*, *The Sea Wolf*, *Sister Carrie*, and *The Virginian*). The coverage in this volume is not always satisfactory. There are three chapters devoted to Henry James, implying a rather fluid definition of American fiction. And while Thomas Dixon's *The Clansmen* and D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) fall outside the stated purview of either volume (a consequence of Palmer's decision to exclude films from the silent era), their omission is unfortunate.

At their most successful, the essays in the nineteenth-century volume consider the different production contexts of nineteenth-century fiction and twentieth-century film. Deborah Cartmell and Judy Simons's "Screening Authorship: *Little Women* on Screen 1933–1994" is one of the volume's standout essays. The authors begin with the premise that film tends to water down the novel's examination of female independence, particularly as it relates to reading and writing, and examine the three most famous adaptations of *Little Women*—George Cukor's 1933 version, Mervyn LeRoy's 1949 version, and Gillian Armstrong's 1994 adaptation. The essay's strength lies in its ability to locate the specific theme of female autonomy and to chart how it unfolds in four different historical moments. In contrast to the essay on *Little Women*, the weakest essays in the nineteenth-century collection cannot bridge the often hundred-year gap between literary and cinematic forms of a text. In these cases, articles are a composite of two unconnected analyses: one of the literary text and the other of its visual representation(s). Part of this problem stems from the huge historical time period separating nineteenth- and twentieth-century representations; part results from Palmer's decision to exclude films from the silent era as being too inaccessible. The strongest essays in the collection either take a theme and carry it through the two centuries, or, as is the case of Stephen's Railton's examination of the pre-cinematic "Tom Shows" in "Readapting *Uncle Tom's Cabin*," they also address the intervening eras. Setting this problem of broad coverage aside, overall these two collections easily renew the reader's interest in the larger ideas and issues surrounding adaptation studies. © 2008 Megan Williams

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